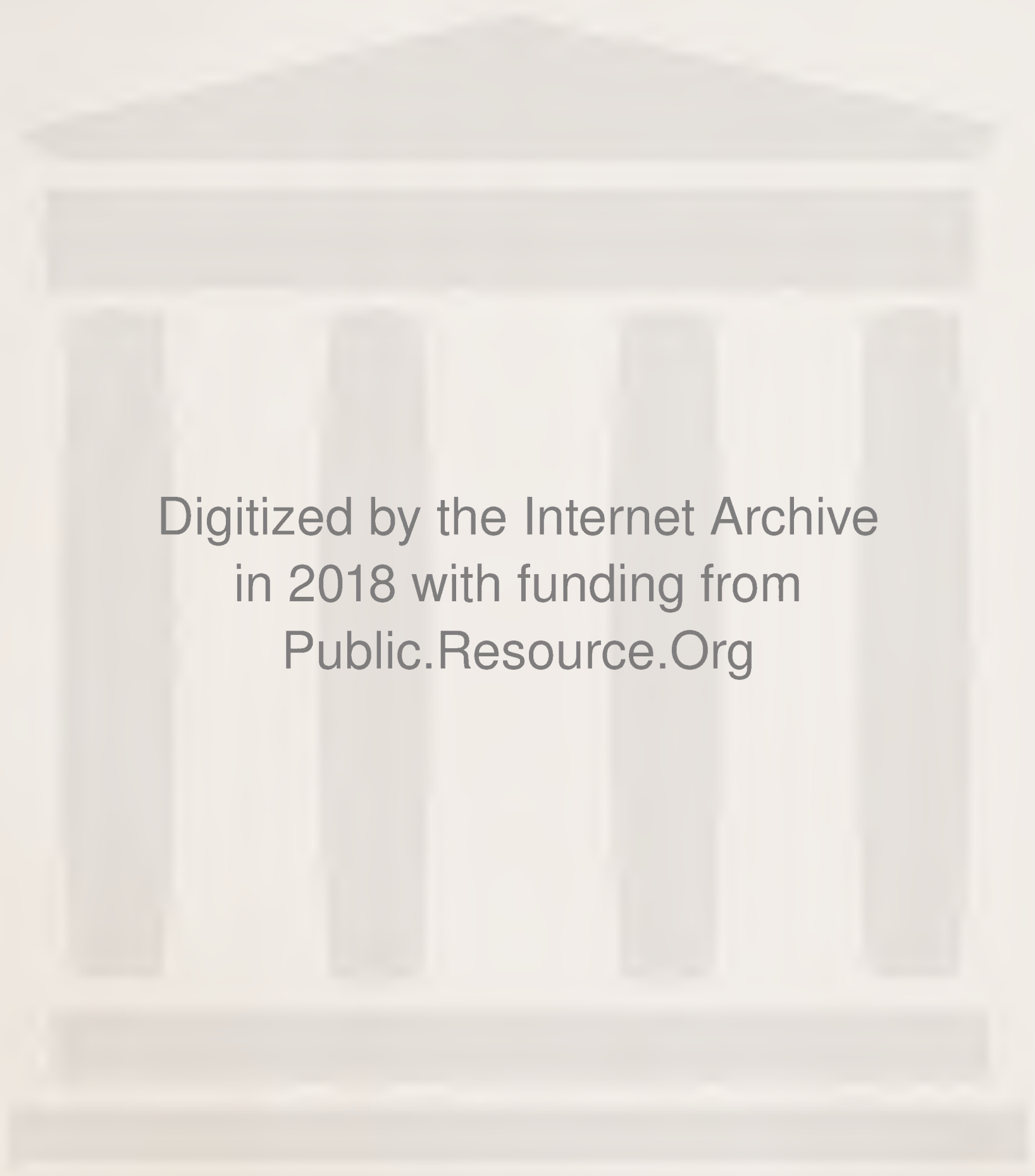


FOLK TALES OF KERALA

I.K.K. MENON



PUBLICATIONS DIVISION



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I.K.K. MENON



**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION & BROADCASTING
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THE JACKAL WAS TOO CLEVER

A JACKAL WAS wandering in search of food. He was extremely hungry, as he didn't get sufficient food for two days. Suddenly an idea struck him.

A farmer named Kelachar, had a large sugarcane field nearby. When the sugarcanes had grown to full size, he had fenced the field safely, and he himself was staying there in a raised hut to see that no one destroys or steals sugarcane from his field.

One day, he was sitting in his *Machan* when the clever jackal approached him. The jackal said, "Kelachar, something is going to happen this night. You know there is a big elephant staying in the forest. That elephant has an eye on your sugarcanes. So be alert with your bow and arrow."

Kelachar was very perturbed. Due to his hard toil and the rich manure he put, his sugarcanes had grown up very well. If the elephant attacked it, all his efforts would go waste. So he had to be on his guard. Kelachar took his bow and arrow and cleaned them. He took his food early that night and lay in wait for the elephant.

From Kelachar's place, the jackal went straight to the hideout of the elephant. The elephant was crouching on the ground near a pond. The jackal stood at a respectable distance and spoke to the elephant; "You are my mighty uncle of the forest. But I know that now a days you are not getting enough food to fill you belly. The difficulty is because you are a vegetarian. And you eat only plants, and that too a selected few."

"You are right, my friend," replied the elephant. "I can't eat all plants. And actually I have to go from forest to forest to get my food. It is a difficult task and on some days I have to go without food. Of course, this forest is better, but still..." the elephant sighed.

"Uncle, I have come all the way to give a piece of good news to you. You will have feast for one full week."

"Interesting! Tell me, tell me. What is it? Where is the feast?" asked the elephant.

"You know that Kelachar has a big sugarcane field. You might have seen it. It is just at the foot of this hill. He is about to cut the sugarcanes tomorrow.

They have grown to full-size and this is the proper time to eat them. No doubt he has fenced it, but that fence is nothing for you! So you can easily go there this midnight when Kelacher will be sleeping, and eat to your heart's content. Don't lose this opportunity."



"Thank you very much for giving me this information. I shall attack the field at the dead of night," said the elephant. "That will be ideal. When Kelachar sleeps he sleeps like a pig and you don't worry about any danger." Saying this, the jackal went down the hill.

He reached the boundary of the sugarcane field where there was a lonely tree. Kelachar was there. He went near him. "What are you doing here?" the jackal enquired. "Nothing in particular. I was just seeing from which place I can shoot my arrow at the elephant," replied Kelachar. "I was about to tell you that," the jackal said. "Do you see a lonely tree at the boundary of the sugarcane field? That is the ideal place for shooting your arrow. You can hide behind the tree. The elephant wouldn't see you."

"You are right, my dear friend. That is the right place." Saying this, Kelachar went to his hut. The jackal went near the tree. In a hole near this tree a snake was staying. The jackal went near that hole and called it. It came out. "My dear brother," began the jackal, "You are facing a grave danger. Have you ever seen Kelachar?"

"Yes, Yes. Isn't he the farmer who owns this sugarcane field?"

"Well, he is going to destroy you, wipe you and your family out of this world. He has come to know that you are staying here, that you are very poisonous and in one bite you can kill anyone."

"Is that so? Then what shall I do jackal brother? Please advise me. You are very resourceful. If I die, my wife and little ones will be put to trouble. The little ones are too young to look after themselves. And my wife will die if she hears of my death. Please show me a way out," implored the snake.

"The best way is to kill Kelachar before he kills you. So do one thing. At midnight he will come this way. Sometimes he stands near this tree to see whether his sugarcanes are safe or not. At that very moment, go and bite him ; not once, but four or five times. You are so poisonous that he will die immediately." Saying this, the jackal bid him good-bye, wished him success and went home with great satisfaction. He was very happy. He was confident that his plan would work well. From the next day onwards he would have plenty to eat. The huge elephant's flesh would be enough for him for a month, and that of Kelachar's for not less than a fortnight. At night the huge tusker entered the sugarcane fields. The fence was no obstacle for him. Kelachar saw it from his observation point. He took his bow and arrow and aimed at the elephant.

He sent three arrows. He was an expert archer. All the three arrows struck the elephant at vulnerable points. Suddenly he felt an inscrutable pain on his ankle as if some insect had bitten him—not once but three or four times. He looked down and saw a snake gliding at fast speed on the ground. Immediately he trampled on it with all his might. The snake died at once. But suddenly Kelachar's bow and arrow fell down from his hands and he too fell dead. The jackal, seeing all this from a distance ventured to come near the dead body of Kelachar. Even though it was dark, he could see the bow lying by his side. On the bow, were some blood spots and so he decided to lick it first, before he started the grand feast. But while licking, his teeth touched the string of the bow and it broke. The string was so tightly tied to both ends of the bow that due to its impact there was sudden jerk and one end of the bow went deep inside the jackal's mouth cutting it into two. And that was the end of the cunning jackal too.

PERUNTHACHAN AND HIS SON

PERUNTHACHAN WAS A renowned architect. He was famous for his skill in constructing temples, houses and tanks. In olden days, huge temples and palatial houses used to be constructed on a grand scale and the supervision of an efficient architect was considered necessary for planning them and carrying out the work. Every stage of work was done in his presence. There was a difference between the architects of those days and today. They used to work with the labourers, eat with them and live with them. Perunthachan too, whenever he took up a piece of work, lived with the labourers and worked with them. The carpenters, masons and others were happy to work with him.

One day the people of a village approached him to dig a big temple-tank. In the past, every temple had a big tank near it, in which the devotees took a dip before entering the temple to offer prayers. A temple committee had been formed to look after the construction of the tank and the job was entrusted to Perunthachan. He started the work of digging the tank with the help of his assistants, but then arose some difference of opinion among the members of the committee. Some wanted it in the shape of a square, others in a rectangular form, some in oval shape and some others in the form of a circle. Perunthachan said, "All right, I shall dig a tank which will satisfy you all."

When the tank was completed, strangely enough it had all the shapes, if seen from different angles, and all were satisfied and they congratulated Perunthachan. But Perunthachan's son, who always worked with him, raised a point. He said, "Father, you've constructed this tank for the use of devotees who want to bathe before going to the temple. Who will come to bathe in this tank when there is a river before they reach the tank? People will always prefer to bathe in the fresh water of a river rather than the stagnant water of a tank."

Perunthachan asked, "Are you mad my boy? The river is far away and those who come to worship in the temple are staying on this bank of the river." The son simply laughed and said, "The river is likely to flow touching the temple tank, father." "That is impossible," answered Perunthachan. "The river is far away." "That does not mean that it will not flow this side. The river can alter its course, or someone can change its course." Perunthachan was furious. He didn't like his son's reply. "Then do it!" he shouted.



The son took up the challenge. He, no doubt, had learnt work from his father. But he had improved upon his knowledge. He started thinking how best he could alter the course of the river without his father ever knowing it. He slipped away in the night and was at it until dawn. He chose a particular place from where he could change the course of the river, and lo! It started flowing, almost touching the temple tank. A person who wanted to come to the temple had to cross the river first. The father was very much impressed by the ingenuity of the son, but at the same time he felt that he had been outsmarted.

After a few days, the villagers again wanted the help of Perunthachan; this time to construct a bridge across the river, so that the people on the other side

of the river could easily come to the temple without the aid of a boat. He built a nice bridge for them within record time. But just for the sake of some fun he installed a doll on one side of the bridge. Whenever a person came from the other side of the bridge, this doll would go down, fill its mouth with water, come up to its former position and spit at the passer-by. And sometimes Perunthachan would stand at a distance and enjoy the 'fun'.

One day his son was coming along the bridge. The doll emptied a mouthful of water on his face. Perunthachan standing at a distance saw it and was very much amused. The son laughed and went away. The very next day another doll was seen at the other end of the bridge. This doll would go in front of anyone who started crossing the bridge. When Perunthachan's doll dipped down to fill its mouth with water and came up ready to spit at anyone, the second doll would give it such a slap on its face that its face would turn and the person walking along the bridge would go unscathed. Perunthachan saw the second doll and he knew that it was a trick played on him by his son. He had to accept defeat at his son's hands but he was happy that his son had excelled him.

TEMPLE FOR A DOG

“THE RIVER IS ROUGH. It is monsoon time and all the water from the mountain is gushing forth. You don't know what filth comes with it. So better be careful,” Nangema warned her husband, Somadeva. “I know it. I have been bathing in this river for the last thirty-five years, Nangema; without taking a dip in its sacred waters, I won't be purified. After the bath I have to go to the temple to start my daily work. I have so much work to do. I have to wash the idol of the deity, and adorn it with fresh flowers. I have to do it every morning before the devotees come,” said Soma. He was the priest in the nearby Siva temple situated on the river bank. “I agree,” said Nangema. “But it is not yet dawn. You better take your dog Channan and a torch with you. I have kept one for your there,” she pointed towards a corner of the verandha. There a palmyra-leaf torch was kept ready for his use.

Channan was his faithful dog. It used to follow its master wherever he went. When he entered the temple, he would sit at the temple gate until he returned after *Pooja*. Generally it was for three hours. In the meantime, Channan would keep himself busy by chasing birds or squirrels or wagging its tail at the sight of an acquaintance. Channan was very alert and watchful. His eyes detected dangers on the way. The dog used to kill snakes and other reptiles which were harmful. As a result of that, Nangema always wanted Channan to accompany her husband. Channan was Somadeva's bodyguard.

The first streak of light had not appeared on the sky. It had rained the previous night and the sound of frogs and crickets could be heard. “The cries of crickets and frogs attract snakes. Be careful,” Nangema warned again. “When Channan is with me I don't fear snakes,” Somadeva consoled her with a smile. He started walking fast to the river bank with Channan. He did not light the torch because he thought that very soon it would be dawn; and, moreover, the way was familiar to him, he could walk upto the river bank with eyes blind-folded. The river was in full spate. Its other bank could not be seen. Without losing time, he got ready for a dip. After removing his clothes he was about to take a plunge when Channan started barking. The dog was not only barking, but also circling him at full speed as if to prevent him from proceeding further. ‘What could it be ?’ thought Somadeva. The dog was generally crazy and used to behave in a funny way at times. So he tried to push it away to one side and go forward, but he couldn't succeed. Then the dog

started moaning at the top of its voice in a peculiar way. It also started scratching on the ground and digging with its claws. But the master wouldn't listen. It was getting late for him and he had to have his bath before losing time. He put one leg in the water and then the other. Very soon he was neck-deep in water and then he saw a strange creature coming towards him. At once the dog jumped over his head, and the next moment, it was in the mouth of



a crocodile. The crocodile dragged the dog away and that was the end of Channan. Soma shouted, "Help, Help !" He was afraid to go deeper into the water to save his pet who sacrificed its life for him. Both Nangema and Somadeva were very sad. They built a temple in memory of the dog and observed the anniversary of its death every year. The temple exists even today and the practice of observing the anniversary continues.

THE HAND OF GODDESS

KANNAPPAN WAS A tribal chief who lived in the hilly region of Chottakkara. He was a cruel man who rejoiced in killing cows, as he believed that the tribals were protected by an invisible force and it was necessary to sacrifice a cow every day to please the force. So he stole cows from the houses of people living in the areas near his house and killed them, and those who tried to stop him were also brutally killed.

Kannappan was a widower and lived with his only daughter, Thevi, whom he loved very much. Thevi disliked the brutality of her father, but never dared to tell him about it. Instead she prayed that her father would become a good man.

Once Kannappan stole a cow and a calf. The cow was sacrificed and the calf was kept in the cowshed. Thevi took an instant liking for it and brought it up as her pet. The calf grew up into a full grown cow. One day Kannappan could not find any cow for the sacrifice and decided to take Thevi's beloved cow. Before Thevi woke up in the morning he took the cow to the wild bushes and menacingly approached it with his knife. The frightened cow broke away and ran deep into the forest, with Kannappan in hot pursuit.

Thevi woke up hearing the commotion. She ran outside the house sobbing bitterly and called out for the cow. On hearing her voice, it ran back to her and lay at her feet. Kannappan ran up to her and asked her to give up the cow. She gathered all her courage and said, "What good fortune will come to us if you kill this innocent cow ? If you love me, you should spare its life. If you still insist on killing it, kill me first." Seeing the tearful face of his daughter, he threw away his knife. Something touched Kannappan deep in his heart and this was a turning point in his life, after which he never killed a cow or any other animal.

Years passed and one night Thevi died of high fever. Kannappan found happiness in looking after the cow. A year after Thevi's death Kannappan saw a dream in which a holy man stood near the cow and the entire place was lit by a divine light. The next day when he went to the cowshed he was surprised to see that the cow had turned into a stone. Kannappan started worshipping the stone and also built a shrine around it in memory of Thevi. Thevi means, 'Devi,' in local dialect and he dedicated the shrine to Durga. Kannappan soon

became a saint and people gathered around him to seek his blessings. He also built some other shrines around the main one. In course of time, Kannappan died and the other tribals also left Chottakkara to live elsewhere. Once again the region was deserted and a thick forest grew up obscuring the shrines.

In the valley of the hill region, lived a few Brahmins and others. These people often went up the hill to collect firewood and grass. Once a woman, while cutting grass sharpened her sickle on a stone. That stone happened to be one of the long forgotten stone idols inside a shrine, and blood oozed out from it. The frightened woman called out and people ran to her rescue. One of them was a Brahmin priest who understood the situation as he saw a divine light around the place. He performed *Pooja* from the ingredients found in a coconut shell and the flow of blood stopped. He also made arrangements for the performance of daily *Pooja*. Gradually it became a big temple and it attracted a number of devotees. Durga, the deity of the temple could control evil spirits which had increased in number at the time when the shrine was unattended and neglected. One such evil spirit was that of a *Yakshi*. *Yakshis* are capable of assuming any form, usually of beautiful women. *Yakshis* generally accost way-farers in lonely places after nightfall. They suck the blood of their victims and leave them lifeless. In olden days people used to protect themselves from *Yakshis* by talismans prescribed by village magicians.

One night a Brahmin priest staying in another village was on his way to attend a festival in the Durga temple. He had to walk some distance to reach the temple. On the way a beautiful young woman joined him. The priest had to stop on the way at his teacher's place to give him a prayer book. This teacher was the *Guru* – a learned man with divine powers. He could recognize evil spirits from others and if anybody touched him, he could also see the evil spirits quite distinctly. The *Guru*, seeing the woman, understood who she was and asked the disciple to look at her, touching him. He did so and was shocked to see the ugly, gigantic *Yakshi*. The *Guru* gave him a few pebbles and a towel to save him from the *Yakshi* till he reached the temple. He had to throw a pebble each time when she came very near, and then she would recede to some distance. Again when she came near, he had to throw the next pebble. The *Guru* had given him eight pebbles and the poor Brahmin found that after throwing the last pebble he had yet to cover a few more steps to reach the temple. The *Yakshi* wanted to take advantage of the situation to catch him. But she could only catch hold of the towel on the priest's shoulder and as she did so the strong hand of the goddess came out of the temple to rescue her devoted priest from the clutches of the *Yakshi*.

KOZHICKATTA APPAM

SADASIVAN WAS ALWAYS fond of food. His wife, Saudamini, was no doubt good at cooking, but sometimes Sadasivan wanted a change and so he would visit his sister, who was staying in another village about six miles away. This sister of his, was an expert cook.

One day he started early in the morning from his house to pay a visit to his sister. The brisk morning walk increased his appetite. By the time he reached his sister's house he heaved a sigh of relief. His sister was a pleasant woman and she greeted her brother with a broad smile. Her husband was a farmer and there was no dearth of provisions in his house. The sister had already made some breakfast for her husband and she brought some steaming kozhikkatta appams for her brother and husband. Sadasivan enjoyed it very much and his sister served more and more appams fresh from the oven. He had not tasted this preparation before, and after drinking a cup of hot milk, he felt extremely happy. He asked his sister, "What is the name of this preparation ? I have eaten it for the first time today and liked it very much."

"Oh," replied his sister, " it is called 'Kozhikkatta Appam.' It is not prepared in our village, but is very popular in these areas."

"What is it made of ? Perhaps Saudamini doesn't know its recipe. When you come next time to my house, please teach her how to make it."

"Certainly," said his sister. "But I am sure she knows it. Probably she hasn't tried it before. It is made out of rice powder." And then she explained how it is to be prepared.

"Kozhikkatta appam ! Really a strange name," said Sadasivan. "I should go on repeating it lest I forget it by the time I reach home."

"Should I write it down for you ?" enquired his sister.

"That is not necessary, I will remember it," replied Sadasivan. "Kozhikkatta Appam... kozhikkatta appam.... kozhikkatta appam....Now I won't forget it."

He bade good-bye to his sister and started walking home. He knew that his memory was poor and so started repeating its name. On the way he had to cross a small rivulet and he saw a man coming from the opposite direction. He

knew him and they exchanged greetings. Sadasivan asked him how far he was going. "Appaccha Appaccha," he replied.



"Appaccha ! Where is it ?" Sadasivan asked. Again the man gave the same reply and pointed towards the North. "There it is, Appaccha, Appaccha;" and without stopping, he went his way.

Sadasivan was astonished and amused. "Strange," he said to himself. "Has he gone mad! Appaccha, appaccha! What could that be?" he thought. Suddenly he forgot the other word! He tried his best to recall it, but couldn't. He remembered only appaccha, but not the other word. He even thought of returning to his sister's place to ask her about it. But he realised that he had already covered half the distance. Moreover, lunch-time was approaching and he was getting hungry. He remembered that his wife would be waiting for him. Generally they took lunch together and she always used to wait for him.

So Sadasivan continued his journey, but the word, 'Appaccha' was disturbing him. What did it mean ? Throughout the way, he tried his best to remember the other word, but couldn't. When they were taking lunch, he tried again to recollect the other word, but failed. At last he told the story to his wife. "You know this morning I went to my sister's house. She prepared a nice thing for breakfast and I liked it very much. It is made out of rice powder and its name is, 'Appaccha.' Please prepare it tomorrow morning for my breakfast."

"What on earth are you saying ? Appaccha ! I've never heard of such a thing," Saudamini said.

"You are simply pretending that you don't know it....This is the difference between you and my sister. She prepares nice things for her husband and you don't want to exert much....I know.....I know. You are too lazy."

At this, his wife got very angry. "Then why did you marry me ?" she asked. "You could have stayed with your sister and eaten the nice things she prepares. Send me to my father's place at once ! I will be far more happy there!" Sadasivan took it as an affront. He became furious and gave a hard slap on her face. She groaned in pain, ran away to the bedroom and started weeping. After some time, Sadasivan felt sorry for her. He went to console her and begged her to forgive his bad behaviour. Still she wept. Sadasivan started wiping away her tears. He stroked her face and said; "Saudamini, please smile, at least for my sake!" She tried to smile. Then she stood up in front of the mirror to arrange her dishevelled hair. Suddenly she exclaimed, "Oh ! My face is swollen like a kozhikkatta appam."

Sadasivan jumped up in joy. "Ah! That is the word! Kozhikkatta appam! That is the one which my sister gave me this morning. Now I remember!" Saudamini laughed. "You can't remember it ? It's so simple. It's not appaccha. I shall make it this evening itself, and give you as many as you want."

A JACKAL AND A FOOLISH TIGER

ON A MOONLIT NIGHT, a jackal strayed away from the jungle and reached a village. There he happened to meet a bitch and fell in love with her. In course of time the bitch became pregnant. Her delivery day was approaching fast. One day the jackal told her; "At the time of your delivery it is better to go to the forest. It is safer there, because here the cruel human beings will treat you and your pups very badly. They may even take away your pups."

The little bitch agreed and both of them reached the forest. He found out the cave of a tiger and making sure that the tiger was not inside it, he said to the bitch, "This is the best place for us to stay. No one will disturb you here."

"But this is the cave of a tiger and when he returns he will kill both of us," the bitch said to the jackal. "Don't worry," the jackal assured her, "I will see to it."

They started arranging their things inside the den. Suddenly they heard the sound of the tiger. It was returning to the den. The bitch got very scared. Her body began to shiver and shake. She started weeping. Then the jackal raised his voice and consoled her. "Don't weep my dear. I know you are hungry. The tiger is sure to return to his den and your desire will be fulfilled. Everyone would return to his home and for God's sake, don't think that he wouldn't come. As soon as he enters the den, we will kill him. That will be a good dinner for us." He said this so loudly that the tiger heard it. Actually this was a trick played by the jackal.

When the tiger came to know that two animals were talking from inside the den, he became suspicious. He thought, 'there are two animals inside and they are waiting for me to kill me and eat me.'

So he decided to stay out and not to go inside. He wanted to go somewhere else, but not to his den. The animals inside the den have plans of eating him up. While going back, he met another jackal. That jackal had come to know of the other jackal's plans to stay in the tiger's den comfortably and make it their home. He asked the tiger, "Uncle I saw you going to your den. Why didn't you go inside ? Have you forgotten something ?"

"No! no!" replied the tiger. "Two animals have occupied my house and they are planning to kill me and eat my flesh. I wouldn't go there. I should find

out some other place to stay." The jackal was very cunning. He was also jealous of the other jackal. He said: "Listen, I shall tell you the entire story. A jackal from this forest happened to go to a village nearby. He met a bitch and married her. The bitch is pregnant now and they have come and occupied your den. If you enter the den you can see it for yourself. Don't be afraid. You are



so strong that they are a game for you. I shall also come with you, if you want. Come!" So saying, the jackal went in front, followed by the tiger.

By that time the tiger had picked up some courage. He said: "If it is so I shall accompany you. Who can occupy my house without my permission? I won't allow them to stay in my house. I require it for my own use." So saying the tiger and his well-wisher, the jackal reached the den.

The jackal inside the den was cleverer than the tiger and the other jackal. He knew that the tiger was coming again, this time with the jackal who was jealous of him and so he told the bitch in such a loud tone that both the tiger and the jackal could hear very well: "Don't worry my dear. The tiger is being brought by one of our own brethren. I have stationed some of my followers at different places in the jungle so that at least one of them would bring the tiger. He has already fallen in my trap. We will kill him and his flesh will suffice for one month."

The tiger was already suspicious. When he overheard this conversation, he ran back at full speed. It was such a hasty retreat that the poor animal fell

down at two or three places and there were some bruises on his body. Blood was oozing out of the wounds. He cursed his lot.

The adviser jackal also followed him. It was a trauma for him as well. When the tiger was taking rest after this misadventure, the jackal again approached him and consoled him. "I am sorry that you have been scared away by that jackal. He is a rogue. I never thought that you are such a coward. You are a tiger, one of the mightiest animals in the jungle. Why should you be afraid of a silly jackal and his bitch?"

"I am fed up with this affair, I won't go there again. You are making a fool of me. You jackals all belong to one group. You are out to destroy the tiger community from the forest so that you can freely move about," the tiger replied.

"Dear uncle, don't think like that! I am your well-wisher and a humble servant. I don't like the way in which a member of my own community behaved with you. I am always against injustice and high-handedness. The other jackal, who foolishly married a bitch from the countryside is in search of a dwelling place. It is all right. But should he occupy your den and render you homeless ? A jackal is no match for a tiger. A tiger can kill a jackal in one stroke. But he seems to ignore this and he is behaving in such a rude and arrogant way. He should be taught a lesson. We should make him vacate your beautiful place. Be bold and come with me again. If you want, you may tie my tail with yours, so that when you flee again, I shall hold you back." The foolish tiger agreed. Their tails were tied together and stealthily they approached the den.

When the bitch heard the footsteps and the guffaw of the tiger, she thought that her end was near. She began to howl. Her husband, who was upset this time went to the mouth of the den and peeped. Then he returned, consoled her and said in a louder voice: "I know you are very hungry and that is why you are howling. You want to eat the tiger at once ? Alright. Wait for a moment. As soon as he peeps in I shall pounce upon him and kill him. This time my faithful brother will not let him go. He has promised to tie his tail with the tiger's and he will not let him go !"

On hearing this the tiger lost all hopes. He was terribly afraid of the animals hiding in the den. He believed that the jackal who posed as his friend and well-wisher was only a spy of the other jackal. So at once he turned back and ran for his life. He ran so fast that his body was cut in many places with cactus thorns and rock pieces. At last his head struck against a big rock and he died. His well-wisher jackal's body also sustained serious injuries, because his tail was tied to the tiger's and soon he too died.

NARANATHU BHRANTHAN

HE WAS GENERALLY called a 'Bhranthan' or a mad man, by the local people. Everyday one could see him rolling a heavy stone up a hill all by himself. When he reached the top of the hill he would roll down the stone. The stone rolled down at terrific speed to the foot of the hill. When it reached the bottom he would laugh so loudly that the entire village could hear it.

The urchins of the village gathered round him and made fun of him. The elders always referred to him as a mad man or 'Bhranthan.' He was called Naranathu Bhranthan because he belonged to an illustrious family called Naranathu. His other brothers were famous in one way or the other. Day in and day out Naranathu Bhranthan rolled the stone uphill and let it down. People started coming to see this futile exercise of his. They also liked to watch the fun in the evening after their daily work.

Someone remarked, "he carries these heavy stones up the hill and lets them roll down. He does a very hard work indeed, without getting anything in return. Why can't he do some useful work and earn money." The Bhranthan heard these remarks. But he only laughed. One day an old man approached Naranathu Bhranthan and asked him, "I know you are a good man and, very strong. Why can't you do some work and earn money? That will be good for you." The Bhranthan turned round and said, "Who said I am not doing a profitable work ? It may not be profitable to me, but it is profitable to the world around me. Look! Everyday I'm demonstrating to the people of this place that it is very difficult to take a heavy stone to the top of the hill, but it is easy to let it down. Let me explain it to you. It is very difficult to do a hard job, but easy to undo it. This is a great principle in life and everyone should learn it. Then people will be wiser."

Rolling a boulder up a hill all by himself and letting it so was his daily routine and it took him one full day to do it. He would then climb down the hill and sit down to rest. At the end of the day he used to go on his rounds with a begging bowl. People in the village were glad to give him some food. He would eat the food he got, and then rest in the shade of some trees until nightfall. When it was dark, he proceeded to a secluded spot, often in some cremation ground. He slept on the bare ground. He would wake up early in the morning and proceed to the foothill to start his daily labour. Another activity

of Bhranthan which was less strenuous, was the counting of long lines of ants.

The cremation ground during night time, is supposed to be the abode of Kali, the Goddess of terror, whose retinue consisted of a brood of roaring



devils, distorted in shape, and fearsome. They came there to perform their ritual dances, at night.

One night, when Bhranthan was sleeping in the cremation ground, he was woken up by the weird, noisy dances of the retinue of Kali. They asked, him to leave the place immediately and threatened to devour him alive, if he did not go. Bhranthan merely smiled and told them that he would like to watch their performance. Unable to scare him, the spirits realized that he was some super human being and requested him to leave the ground as the followers of Kali could not perform their dance in the presence of a stranger. They also told him to ask for any boon he desired. This interested Bhranthan and approaching Goddess Kali, he asked her if she knew exactly on what date he would die. The all-knowing Goddess thought for a while and told him the exact date and time of his death. Then he asked her whether she could change the date. Kali confessed her inability to do this, on hearing which Bhranthan merely laughed, with the satisfaction of having taught her a lesson ! He could, after all, make her realise her limitations ! Days passed on as usual. Finally, as Goddess Kali had predicted, the day for Bhranthan came. That night as Bhranthan was sleeping in the crematorium, he died in his sleep, without any pain; as a boon from the Goddess, whose limitations he had laughed at.

VILLADOM PICKLES

THERE WAS A VILLAGE named Villadom in Kerala. The people there were very much united. They believed in co-operative efforts and common ventures. Each one helped the other and they were very happy.

It was time for making mango pickles and so the village chieftain convened a meeting of elders. The members of the panchayat unanimously decided that they should prepare pickles together instead of preparing them individually. 'Why put mangoes in separate jars,' they thought; 'it is better to prepare in one jar.'

But there was a problem; where would they get such a big jar ? It was not available anywhere. So an idea struck them. There were three wells in the village - two big and one small. They could utilise the small well for making pickles and each one could take his family's share from it, at the appropriate time. So each one brought his or her mangoes with other ingredients like chilli, salt etc. and put them in the well. Thereafter they put a fence around the well. They decided that no one should use the well for some time.

Days passed and it was time to take the pickles. All the villagers gathered around the well with jars to take their share. Each one would take the share in accordance with, the number of mangoes put by him or her in the well. Tying a big jar around his neck each man jumped in to take his share. Each one had to dive deep to take his share of pickled mangoes. The next man waited. The first man didn't come up for quite some time. The second man became impatient. He thought that the first man was taking more than his share. So he shouldn't wait longer. He also had fastened a big jar around his neck and jumped in. Both of them didn't come up.

The other people waiting outside got suspicious. One by one they also jumped in, and none ever came out. Jealousy and greed for more, killed them all.

CHANDU AND OMANA

CHANDU WAS A YOUNG man who belonged to a noble family. He had finished his studies and was on the look out for a suitable bride. He happened to see a girl named Omana in the neighbouring village and fell madly in love with her.

She too belonged to a good family. Omana also loved Chandu. One day Chandu opened his heart to his sister-in-law, Chirutha, the wife of his elder brother. Chirutha had seen Omana before and she approved the match. She asked Chandu to propose to Omana.

One day Chandu wore his best clothes and started for Omana's place. He put the proposal to her.

Omana wanted to test him before giving her final word. She went inside her house and brought a vessel containing a measure of mustard and sesame. She said, "Please separate the mustard in this vessel and bring it to me tomorrow."

Chandu was perplexed. But he knew that his sister-in-law was very clever and he was sure that she would find a way out. Otherwise even if he were to keep awake for the entire night and day, he wouldn't be able to separate even one-tenth of the mustard. Without saying a word to Omana he took the vessel to his house.

Chirutha, his sister-in-law was anxious to know the result of his mission. She enquired, "Chandu, were you able to meet Omana ? What was finally decided ?" Chandu explained to her about what happened in Omana's house and he placed the vessel in front of her.

She smiled and said, "All right, keep the vessel in the backyard of the house. I shall see what can be done about the matter."

Chandu took the vessel to the backyard and kept it there. Then his sister-in-law called a servant and asked him to bring a nest of ants from a tree. Big ants generally made their nests on the leaves of trees. With much difficulty the servant procured an ants' nest. She took the nest and put it inside the vessel. During night the ants removed all sesame from the vessel. They don't eat mustard and so the mustard was left behind in the vessel. Chandu was amazed at the intelligence of his sister-in-law. He was extremely happy. The next

morning he started for Omana's house. Omana was pleased. She took the



vessel and kept it inside the house. Then she came out with another vessel and said, "Take this vessel and return it with dew-water tomorrow."

Chandu was shocked. The other work was comparatively easy. From where could he get dew-water ? This was another challenge. But he was confident that his clever sister-in-law would help him this time also. So without uttering a word, he took that vessel and walked home.

His sister-in-law was waiting for him there. When she saw Chandu with another vessel, she enquired "What is the outcome of your second visit,

Chandu? What is this vessel for ?" "Chandu was crest-fallen. He showed the empty vessel to her and said," This time also Omana has sent me back with another impossible task. By tomorrow she wants some dew-water in this vessel." At once Chirutha said, "Don't you worry. We will find out some way."

Chandu heaved a sigh of relief. In the evening, Chandu's sister-in-law sent word to all the washermen of the place to meet her. They came. She told them, " Please do one thing for me. Take out all the clothes that you have got for washing and spread them on the line outside your houses before dusk. Take them back in the morning, squeeze them into a pot so that you may get dew-water. When you have collected them in small pots, please bring them to me."

The washermen followed her instructions and the next morning brought the dew-water in small pots and gave them to Chirutha. She poured the contents of each pot into the vessel given to her by Chandu. She called him and said, "Take the vessel containing the dew-water to Omana and let her be satisfied."

Chandu gladly took the vessel to Omana's house and placed it before her and said, "Here is the dew-water you wanted. Are you satisfied ?" Omana gave him a charming smile. She was immensely pleased. Chandu has succeeded in the second test. Chandu was wondering what her next test would be.

She said," By tomorrow will you please bring me hundred tender betel leaves? They should be plucked afresh, but you shouldn't pluck them with your hand from the betel creeper or cut them with a knife." Chandu was in trouble again. How could he get betel leaves without plucking, or without using a knife? He thought that it was impossible. Anyway he decided to consult his sister-in-law, Chirutha, again.

When Chirutha saw Chandu with a long face she understood that Omana has sent him back with another puzzle. She asked, "I know you have come back with another riddle. What is it? Tell me." Chandu told her in brief what happened at Omana's place. "Doesn't matter," she said, "I shall manage." She had a parrot in a cage. She took the parrot out and went to a betel leaves garden. The parrot plucked the betel leaves with its beak and dropped them. Chirutha picked them up from the ground and sorted out the tender betel leaves and arranged a hundred such leaves on a platter and gave it to Chandu.

Chandu was overjoyed. He thanked his sister-in-law and the next morning started for Omana's house. She smiled at Chandu, thanked him and said, "This time also you have won. But before I marry you, I want another thing. This time it is the milk of a tigress. It is used for making a special hair-oil for my use. I want it by tomorrow morning."

This gave a shock to Chandu. Both of them loved each other but why was Omana so cruel to him, thought Chandu. With downcast eyes he only said, "I shall try, but I can't promise." "Well in that case, Chandu, I will have to look for someone who can help me in getting the milk of a tigress." "I shall try," said Chandu.

Milk of tigress! Who will milk a tigress? Well, he would not be able to fulfil this wish of Omana. Anyway, he thought he would consult his resourceful sister-in-law.

When she heard the news, Chirutha was somewhat angry. This girl is really proud and haughty, she thought. Anyway, she decided to try best to get tigress, milk. Suddenly an idea struck her. She sent for some hunters and she asked them to catch a live tigress and bring it in a cage. The hunters were loyal people and at once they started a hunt in the forest nearby. That forest contained a good number of tigers. By night, they could catch a tigress, cage it and bring it to Chirutha. Chirutha gave them presents and asked them to come again the next morning. They came and Chandu started to Omana's house with the hunters carrying the cage. This time, his sister-in-law Chirutha also went with him.

Chirutha asked the hunters to place the cage in front of Omana. This time it was Chirutha who spoke. "Omana, you wanted the milk of a tigress. We have brought a tigress itself. You milk the tigers and prepare your hair-oil. Then, after a brief pause, she said, "I hope, you can now give your consent." At once Omana said, "I consent, I consent." She didn't argue further.

The marriage of Chandu and Omana took place very soon under the supervision of Chirutha.

PRABHAKARAN

IN THE OLDEN DAYS, students used to stay in the teacher's house and learn. At a young age, boys were sent to the teacher's house. This system of education *was* called 'Gurukula.'

Prabhakaran was a boy of twelve. He was staying in his teacher's house to learn Sanskrit. Prabhakaran was a good student and his teacher liked him. But the teacher didn't show his affection towards the boy. Rather, he was more strict towards him. One day Prabhakaran was not very attentive in the class. This made the teacher angry. He beat him severely. Prabhakaran wept for some time. Then he wanted to wreak his vengeance on the teacher.

In his rage he decided to kill the teacher. He chalked out a plan for this: Prabhakaran would climb to the roof of the teacher's bed-room with a heavy granite stone and drop it on the teacher's head, when he was asleep. So after taking his dinner, Prabhakaran went out, picked up a heavy stone and climbed to the roof of the room. After some time his teacher and his wife retired to bed. Before sleeping they talked for some time.

During the talk Prabhakaran heard his name being mentioned. He listened to their conversation attentively. The teacher's wife was equally fond of Prabhakaran. She was telling the teacher, "This morning you were very harsh on Prabhakaran. You beat him umpteen times, mercilessly. Is he not the best boy in your class ? If you behave in this manner he will run away from here and you will lose a good student."

The teacher replied, "You are right. I should not have been so cruel to him. But you know, he was not attentive in the class. I was taking an important lesson and he was talking to another boy. When I saw it, I lost my temper. Prabhakaran should not miss important lessons. So I beat him in such a way that the punishment may deter him from such indifference in future."

On hearing this, Prabhakaran became very sad. It was with good intention that the teacher punished him. He was overwhelmed with remorse. The whole night he sat on the roof. The next morning, after his lessons, he approached his teacher when he was alone and asked him, "Suppose a student decides to kill his own teacher, what punishment does he deserve ?" The teacher thought for a while; "Well, the punishment for *Guru-hatya* is prescribed in one of the

Shastras," he said. If a student has desired to kill his teacher, he should punish himself by sitting on the ground, covering his body upto the neck with corn husk. Then he should set fire to the mound of husk. The husk will burn very slowly. So it will be a slow death. This is prescribed for such a heinous crime."

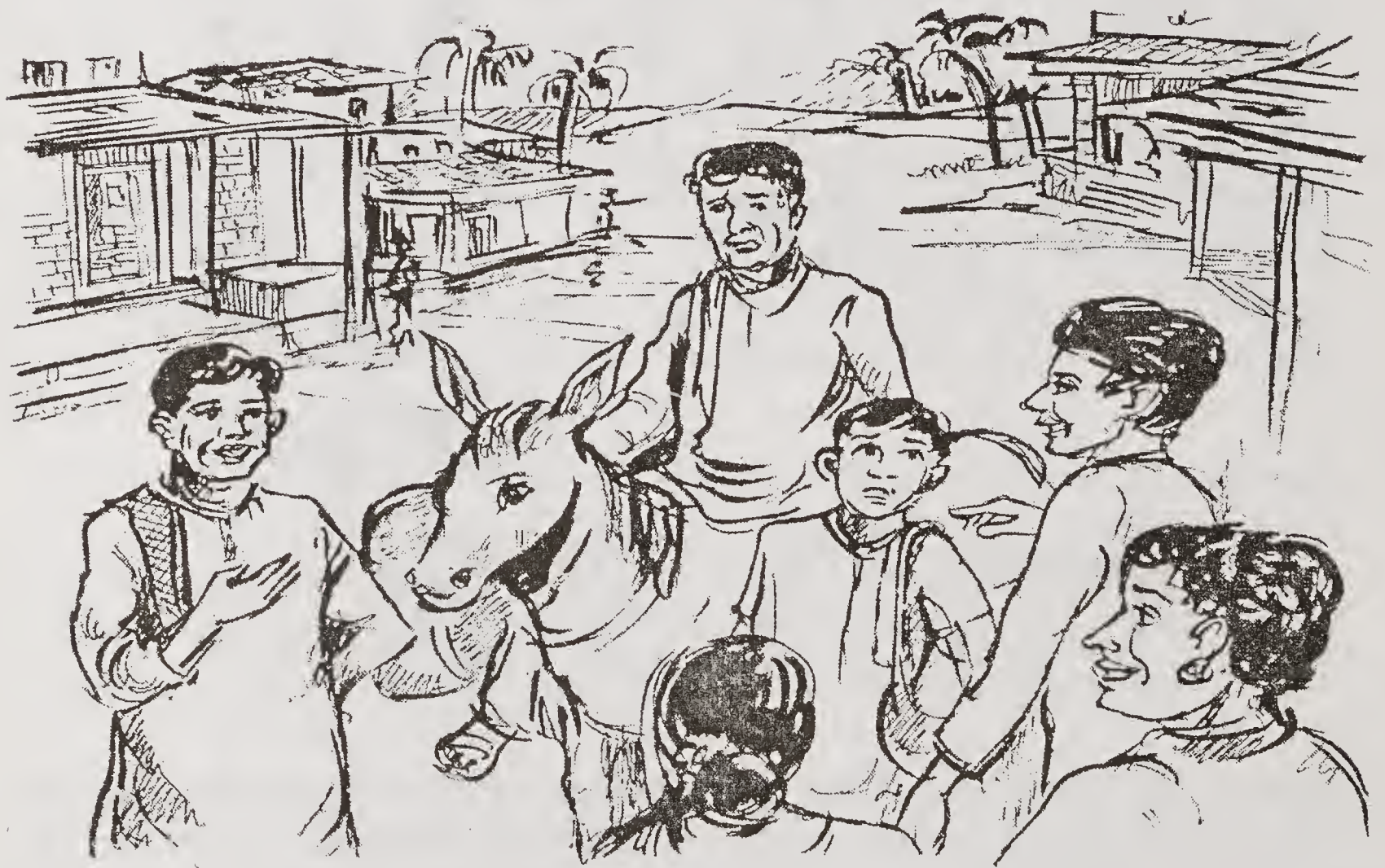
On hearing this, Prabhakaran went out of the house. He purchased a huge quantity of husk from the market. He selected a secluded place, and made a



mound of husk and sat inside the mound. He covered his body with husk, then set fire to it. It started burning slowly. His class-mates came to know this after some time. They rushed to the spot. Prabhakaran informed them of the happenings of the previous day. Then he said, "I have decided to undergo this punishment. No one can deter me from it. But before I die I will compose a *Kavya* or long poem in praise of Lord Krishna. If you are interested, you may take it down." And then he started composing and reciting one *shloka* after the other. His colleagues copied them down. This, after compilation, has come to be called, *Shri Krishna Vilas*, a famous *Kavya* in Sanskrit consisting of twelve *Sargas* or Chapters. But he couldn't complete the last *Sarga*. Before that the fire consumed him and the last verse in *Shri Krishna Vilas* stops at two words—"Pasyapriya Konkana."

FATHER, SON AND DONKEY

A FATHER AND HIS SON were going to the bazaar. They had their donkey with them. They wanted to purchase certain things from the bazaar and take them home on the donkey's back. Some people saw them. They asked the old man, "How far are you going ?" "We are going upto the bazaar," he replied. "Well, the bazaar is far away. Why do you walk when a donkey is with you?" On hearing this, the old man told his son, "What they say is true. You get up on the back of the donkey and I shall walk by your side."



So the son got up on the donkey and together they walked a mile. Then they saw another set of people. They were pointing at the son and laughing. The father asked, "Why are you laughing ? Tell me the reason."

"Oh !" they said, "The young man is riding the donkey and the old man is walking. We are amused to see it. Actually the young man should walk and the old man should sit on the donkey."

When the son heard these remarks he was ashamed. Immediately he got down from the donkey and forced his father to sit on it.

They went on for a mile when they saw some people again making fun of them. The son enquired, 'What is the fun about? Why are you laughing?' One of them replied, 'Isn't it funny? The old man is on the donkey, it is alright. But why should you walk? When you have got a strong donkey, make the best use of it. Why can't you sit behind your father?'

This suggestion appeared to be good to both of them. So the father said, "Come on, my son. We can cover the remaining distance, both of us riding on the donkey."

The son too got on the donkey and they travelled some more distance. Then they saw another jeering crowd. One among them was remarking, "See that poor animal. It is gasping! It can't bear the weight of two hefty people. Why are they so cruel to the animal? Actually they have come all the way on the donkey. Now let them carry the donkey for the rest of their journey."

The father and son heard these remarks and they were sorry for the poor animal. They had two poles in their hands. They tied the donkey's legs to the poles, kept the poles on their shoulders and walked with the donkey suspended upside down to the poles.

Before reaching the bazaar they had to cross a narrow bridge. When they came to the centre of the bridge the donkey wiggled and all of them fell into the river. With both its feet tied, the donkey drowned in the river and the old man and his son thus paid dearly for their foolishness and for reacting to other peoples' comments, without thoughtfulness.

THE MIRROR AND THE SUSPICIOUS WIFE

IN OLDEN DAYS there were no mirrors. Not long after it was invented, a man got a mirror from somewhere. It was an unknown thing in those days and the man kept it secretly in his box. When he looked into the mirror he saw an image. He had not seen his own image clearly before and thought that it was the face of his father, who was no more.

Every morning before he set out to his place of work, he would look at it and keep it back safely. Again in the evening he would take it out and look at it for the sheer pleasure of seeing his father's face. This continued for some days and the man was very happy to see his father's face every day. His wife saw this once or twice but didn't ask him about it.



One day, in his absence his wife opened his box and she saw the mirror. It was a woman's picture and she became suspicious. She was sure that her husband was in love with another woman and that he wanted to see her sweet face every day and that was why he opened the box every morning and evening. On that day when the husband came home, he said, "I am feeling very hungry. Kindly prepare some food for me immediately." She coolly replied, "Go to that woman ! She will prepare food for you." The husband was perplexed; but his wife went on, "Where? Which woman?" "Don' t you know where she is? Don' t pretend to be innocent. You want to see her two times a day and that is why you open your box every morning and evening."

Still the husband did not understand what she was saying. He asked her, "What do you mean? To whom should I go?" "Go to your lady love, whose picture you keep secretly in your box. Don't think that you can always fool me. If you don't want me, I shall go back to my mother's place. Tell me whose picture are you keeping in your box ?" "Oh!" he said, "Its my father's picture."

"But your father is not a woman. Alright, I'll show it to you. Come with me!"

His wife followed him. He opened his box and looked at the mirror. She also looked into it. She saw her husband's face in it. When she was peeping over his shoulder she saw her face also.

Then they knew that the mirror was reflecting their own faces. The wife was overjoyed to see this precious acquisition of her husband—a glass which showed their faces!

SIMPLETON

A MAN OWNED A goat and one day it was missing. While grazing it had gone astray. So he set out in search of the goat. It was nowhere to be found. On the way he saw a house on fire. He went there to console the owner of the house and, by words of sympathy said, "What a pity! How did this happen? I feel sorry for you, etc." A number of people had gathered there to extinguish the fire and some one among them said, "This is not the time to ask questions. Get some water and help to put the fire out." He did accordingly and joined them in that job.

Thereafter, he went from there, still calling his goat by its name. Then he saw a potter, baking his pots over a big fire. At once he got some water and put out the fire, saying, "I shall help you."

The potter was very angry. He asked, "Is this the way to help me ? You have ruined my pots. I would have been very much pleased if you had taken and finished pot and tapped on them to see whether they are good. And then you could have offered some price for it and bought it!"



The man left that place still calling for his goat. On his way he saw a foreigner who was completely bald and had no hair on his head. Remembering the potter's words, he gently tapped on the white man's head and asked, "Oh it is quite nice and round ! Will you sell this? What is its price?" The angry foreigner called him a fool and returned his taps; but not very gently !

CLEVER MARIA

IN A VILLAGE in Kerala there lived a burglar. He was very clever and before getting into houses for burglary he used to enquire about the habits of the people staying in that house. Then at the dead of night he used to commit burglary.

Maria was a lady living in the same village. She was frugal and never wasted money. Maria had a son by the name, Avaran. Some one told the burglar that Maria was very rich and she had a lot of ornaments with her. Cleverly the burglar found out the location of the house and planned the burglary. That night, getting up to the roof of the house he started removing the roof-covering made of palm leaves.

The old lady heard the noise and was sure that a burglar was on the roof of the house. So she had to play some trick. She hit upon a plan. "Avaran, Avaran," she called out to her son who was sleeping. "Avaran, I hope our money-box and jewellery are kept in the ceiling," she asked cleverly.

Generally, old houses in Kerala had a thatched roofing and below that, a wooden ceiling. Certain things used to be kept in the space between the roofing and wooden ceiling. So when the burglar heard the question put by Maria, he thought that there was a ceiling below the thatched roof. So he jumped down.

But actually in Maria's house there was no wooden ceiling. So the burglar fell to the floor of the house which was about thirty feet below and broke his spine.

Immediately Maria called all the neighbours and they handed over the thief to the police. She saved her house from the burglar, with her presence of mind.

THE RAJA AND HIS SERVANTS

IN OLDEN TIMES Kerala consisted of small states. Each State was governed by a Raja. One such Raja had a large number of servants in his palace. Among them were two servants, Govindan and Raman who had joined service on the same date. Govindan was very smart and intelligent and he got promotion one after another until at last, he got a much higher pay than Raman. Raman was therefore jealous of Govindan. One day he told the Raja, "Sir, both myself and Govindan joined your service on the same day. Govindan is now getting a fat salary, and occupying a high place. I am still a menial, getting the same pay."

Just when he was speaking, a bullock cart passed along the road in front of the palace. The Raja told Raman, "Go and find out who is in the cart." Raman ran to the road and returned soon. "Sir, they are people from the South," replied Raman. "What are their names?" the Raja enquired. Raman again ran to the road and came back with the answer. "Gopalakrishna Iyer and Alamelu Ammal, Sir," he said, "Go and ask where they are going?" Raman went again, and returned, "They are going to Thiruvananthapuram, Sir." "For what purpose are they going there?" asked the Raja. That he didn't know. So again he ran to the road and returned after some time. "They are going to attend a marriage," Sir, he found out. "I want to know whose marriage it is, find out." Raman ran again and returned. "It is for the marriage of the gentleman's youngest brother," he said. "When are they returning?" asked the Raja. "I shall find out Sir," said Raman. "He went there again, came back and reported, "They are returning the next Saturday, Sir."

Then the Raja sent for Govindan. By that time the cart taking Iyer and his wife had already left. But another party, travelling in another bullock cart got down on the road probably for a break in their journey and also to take some light refreshments. The Raja saw them. In the meanwhile, Govindan had also come. The Raja called Govindan and asked him who they were. At once he ran there and returned after some time. He said, "They are people from Tirur, going to Kottayam." The Raja asked, "Who are they? Go and ask where they are going." "Sir, your obedient servant has already enquired about it. They are Muslims. The elder one's name is Kasim and the younger one's Kadir." "Then go and enquire why they are going to Kottayam." "Sir, I have asked them about it. They are going to attend a civil case there, the hearing of which is

fixed for tomorrow." " Good," said the Raja." Ask them what the case is about?" " Sir, I have enquired that too. The case is against a debtor called Hussain. He had borrowed five thousand rupees from Kasim six years back and he is neither paying any interest nor the money."



Then he turned to Govindan and said, "Thank you, Govindan." The Raja looked at Raman. "You may go now" he told Govindan. When he had gone he told Raman, "Raman, now you see the difference between you and Govindan. You had to run five or six times for the information. Govindan went there only once and he got more information than you did." Raman was satisfied that Govindan was more competent and he deserved promotions and the fatter salary he earned.

A RAZOR FOR RAJA

PRATAPA VARMAN WAS the Raja of a small state in Kerala. His barber's name was Appu. The Raja liked Appu very much. One day he told Appu, "I am very much pleased with you. I will give you whatever you want. You may ask for anything!" "Sir, I have got only one wish. But I doubt very much whether you would grant it; I want to become Prathana Mantri (Prime Minister) of your State," said Appu.

The Raja, made Appu, his Prime Minister. One day Appu told the Raja, "Sir, you are keeping a large army. There is no war at present and we need not keep such a big army. The soldiers are idling away their time. Disband the army and save the expenditure. We should not waste money on idlers. Instead, we will keep a hound of dogs to guard our frontiers. Ferocious dogs will be able to scare away enemies, if at all they come."

The King agreed to the proposal and about three-fourths of the army was disbanded. Hundreds of dogs were recruited and given training to guard the frontiers, under the direct supervision of the new Prime Minister.

The Raja of the neighbouring state came to know of the recent developments in Pratapa Varman's state and he harboured plans of annexing it to his kingdom. Earlier he was afraid of the strong army of Pratapa Varman, and so, he abandoned the idea. Now, because a major portion of his army was disbanded, he attacked Pratapa Varman's state.

The Prime Minister immediately unleashed the dogs, but instead of attacking the enemy, they went in different directions and also fought with each other. Pratapa Varman's forces had to surrender and he himself had to flee, the Prime Minister, following his master. They took refuge in a forest. But the Prime Minister was not bothered. He consoled the Raja thus : "My Lord, don't be worried. We shall not be without a job. I have got my old razor with me and it will provide me livelihood. Your Highness can have my father's razor. At the time of his death he bequeathed it to me. It is a better razor. Sir you can't get such a good razor in the market!"

The King, in his current state, had little (if any) option left with him.

CHAMI'S EXPERIENCES

CHAMI WAS A KURAVA. Kurava was the name of one of the hill tribes of Kerala. They used to stay in the vicinity of forests and occasionally came down to the plains. Chami had his own land in the hill-side. He cultivated it and led a simple life. He had two daughters. Both the daughters were married. The elder one was married to a poor family. They were farmers and lived in a simple way like him. The younger one was married to a family of businessmen who amassed more and more money. Once the old man set out to stay with his daughters and find out for himself, how they were thriving. First, he went to his elder daughter's place. He enjoyed his stay there. He liked their food, their behaviour, manners etc. At night, he slept on the floor, on a rough mat, as he was used to. He returned very happy and contented and told his wife, "Our elder girl is well settled in life and we need not worry about her."

His next visit was to his younger daughter's house. Her husband's people had a very big house and they lived in great comfort. There everyone was busy looking after their business and he felt rather lonely. Even his daughter was very busy and couldn't get much time to speak to him. The food served there was extremely rich and he could hardly digest it. After food, sweets and fruits were served and he couldn't eat so much. At the same time he couldn't refuse it. At last his stomach was badly upset. But the worst thing happened when he went to sleep. In the bed room there was only a big cot. A huge mosquito curtain covered the entire cot and it was fixed on a high frame. He thought that he had to climb to the top of the mosquito curtain and sleep there. So he climbed to the top. Climbing was not difficult as he was accustomed to climbing trees. But as he reached the top, the curtain frames gave way and he fell flat on the cot. He didn't have good sleep that night. The next morning when his daughter came into the room she knew what had happened. She was upset, but she was able to repair the curtain before anybody knew about it.

That evening Chami returned home. He was unusually silent. So his wife asked him, "How was the stay in our younger daughter's place ? Why did you return so early ?" He heaved a sigh and said, "Poor girl! She is not well at all. The food available there, is not fit for eating; it upsets one's stomach. I have not got over it. But one can bear everything, except the somersault in the night. I escaped a serious injury. That was why I returned today itself." And he narrated his experience, little realising, how ridiculous and foolish he sounded.

A RESOURCEFUL GOLDSMITH

IN THE OLDEN DAYS, ornaments were made to order. If anyone wanted to have an ornament made, he generally entrusted the quantity of gold required for making it with the goldsmith and after two, three or four days as the case may be, the goldsmith would make it and keep it ready according to specifications.

The goldsmith generally worked in his own 'aala' or workshop. A rich zamindar wanted to have a necklace made for his daughter, who was about to get married. The best goldsmith in the locality was Chilean. So, he was asked to do the work. Chilean was no doubt a good workman, but it was well known that whenever he touched gold, a little of it would vanish under his palm. The zamindar didn't want this to happen, and so asked one of his servants to stay in the Chilean's aala throughout the day. After the day's work, Chilean would leave the gold, in whatever state it was to the servant, who would weigh it and make sure that there was not the slightest loss. In four day's time, the work was over. It was a beautiful necklace. The zamindar was eager to see it and ordered it to be brought to his house. So it was taken to him in a piece of velvet, the goldsmith walking in front and the servant behind.

On the way to zamindar's house they had to cross a small brook. When they came to the middle of the brook the necklace fell into the water. The goldsmith made a hue and cry and jumped into the water. He however recovered it and both of them straightaway went to the zamindar's house. The zamindar and his family were immensely pleased to see the beautiful necklace which was exactly as they had wanted it to be. He gave a present to the goldsmith, besides the remuneration. The zamindar also thanked and congratulated his servant, who had watched over the work so well.

But their joy did not last long. A week later it was found that the colour of the necklace had changed. No one knew how it happened. What actually happened was this. Chilean, the goldsmith cleverly made an exact replica of the necklace in brass. This was done secretly in his house. He earlier kept the brass necklace in the middle of the brook. When the real necklace fell, it was not taken out; instead the brass necklace was brought out, while the golden one, remained in the brook. On his way back to his house he picked it up. And the one given to the zamindar was made of brass !

REAL MUSIC LOVER

IN KERALA, THERE was a king, who loved music. He used to invite eminent musicians to his palace and arranged concerts for every confirmed music-lover who flocked to the palace in large numbers.

One day he arranged a grand programme and invited eminent musicians to it. But he laid down one stipulation. Before the concert, he announced: "I find that many music lovers appreciate music by antics, gesticulations, contortions of the face, shaking their heads and beating with their hands and feet. These distract others; so if anyone indulges in such antics his head would be cut off."

A great musician began to sing. It was really a feast for the ears, but none dared to move their hands or feet. There was pin-drop silence among the audience. But one of them, a great expert himself, was so charmed by the melodious music of the master musician, that he could not contain himself. He began to shake his head and beat on his thighs in appreciation of the music. Someone sitting near him pointed out the impropriety, and the threat to his



life. But he exclaimed loudly; "I do not care if I lose my head," and continued his antics. The king heard what he said. Instead of getting angry, he proclaimed, "Here is a true lover of music. For the sake of music, he is prepared to sacrifice his life. After the end of the concert I am going to present him a 'Veerasringhala', a beautiful golden chain of honour, awarded to eminent persons."

OVERCAUTIOUS MONKEYS

A LANDLORD HAD A big garden. He appointed a gardener to look after it. The gardener was very faithful and he took good care of the garden. Every day he had to water the plants and so there was no holiday for him. If he took leave, all the plants would dry up. Whenever he approached the landlord with a request for a leave, the latter would say, "There is no one else to water the plants. So how can I give you a leave?" The gardener had no reply and so he had to forgo holidays. The drudgery continued. One day, he decided to take leave. On that day, the temple festival was going on and he wanted to participate in it.



Some monkeys were staying on the trees in a nearby forest. The gardener approached them. He met the leader of the monkeys and told him, "You know I am the gardener of the big garden over there. It belongs to the landlord and he has engaged me as his gardener. But he is very unkind. He doesn't give me a single day's rest. He doesn't grant me a holiday. But on this festival day, I want to enjoy. Can you please help me?"

"In what way can I help you?" the monkey-chief asked. "Today, you and the other monkeys, may please look after my work. I shall give you some vessels. Please take them to the river, fill them with water and water the plants," replied the gardener. The monkey chief said, "Alright, don't you worry, we shall look after your work. You may go for the festival."

The gardener was very happy. After giving some vessels to the monkeys for carrying water he went to the temple. But the monkeys had a doubt; how much water should be poured on each plant? At last the chief took a decision. He said, "for seeing how deep the roots have gone in, you have to pull them out, see the length of the roots and water accordingly." So the monkeys plucked out all the plants, saw the length of roots and planted them back, but haphazardly. Most of the plants lost their roots in the process.

The next day the landlord saw that all the plants in his garden were uprooted by someone and they were drying up. To know the reason he called the gardener. The gardener told him what had happened and the landlord was very angry. He said, "I am going to dismiss you for this negligence of duty and also for acting foolishly."

From the next day the gardener was without a job !

HONEST SERVANT

ONCE THERE WAS a servant who always spoke the truth. He never uttered a lie, and so the master and the mistress of the house liked him. One day when the master was away, his wife wound up their time-piece and it fell from her hand. She was afraid that her husband would scold her for her carelessness and so she told the servant boy not to tell her husband that it fell down from her hands. "Tell him that it fell down from the table and broke," the mistress instructed. The boy didn't say anything. In the evening when the master of the house returned, he came to know that the time-piece had stopped and its glass was broken. He called his wife and asked, "Who broke this time-piece ?" She replied, "I don't know. This afternoon a strong wind blew and it might have fallen from the table."

"No," he replied, "Someone must have tampered with it; may be the servant-boy." He called the servant boy. The boy told him, "Memsaab was winding it and it fell down from her hands; but she told me that I shouldn't tell the truth. She told me to tell you that it fell down from the table when a strong wind blew through the window." His master was very angry. He told his wife, "You first told a lie and secondly also asked the boy to tell a lie. Thus you have committed two sins. That is very bad of you !"

From that day onwards, she was trying to find fault with the servant boy. She started telling her husband that he was no good and that he should be sent away. He believed her stories and one day the master dismissed him from service.

The servant boy went to another house and asked the mistress of the house whether he could be employed as their servant. She asked him, "Why did you leave your previous job?" The boy replied, "I had to leave their service because I spoke the truth." "Because you spoke the truth ?" enquired the lady. "Yes," he said. "It's very strange ! I am hearing this for the first time! Honesty is a virtue. How can you be punished for having told the truth ?" she exclaimed. The boy narrated the entire story. The lady of the house was very much amused. She said, "Alright. You may join straightaway. I like honest people."

Days passed by. Both the lady and her husband were very much impressed by the new servant's work and behaviour. This lady had a slight squint in one eye.

One day, she sent a parcel through him to one of her friends. The boy took it to the later, and came back. The lady asked him, "I hope you have delivered the parcel to my friend. Did she ask you who sent it?" "Yes," the boy replied; "I told her that it was sent by you. Since I didn't know your real name I told



her that the squint-eyed lady had sent it." The lady was very angry when she heard it. She thought that he was making fun of her, and immediately dismissed him from her service. His honesty cost him his job here too.

EROOR BHIMAN

EROOR BHIMAN WAS a strong man. He was called Bhiman because of his strength. Bhiman was very good at eating too. He could easily gulp down as much rice as ten persons could eat.



One day when he was returning home he was caught in rain. To avoid being drenched, he took shelter in a rich man's house. It was monsoon season and the rain was showing no signs of stopping. It looked as if the rain would continue for hours.

So Bhiman asked the rich man, "Please give me an umbrella. I shall return it tomorrow." "There is no umbrella here," said the rich man. "Reach home before it is dark," so saying, he closed the door.

Then an idea struck Bhiman. There was a large metal vessel, used for boiling paddy, lying in front of the house. The vessel was so heavy that even three or four persons couldn't lift it. It used to be carried on the shoulder by suspending it from a strong, wooden beam. And six persons were required to carry it. But Bhiman could easily lift it and placed it upside down on his head. It was dark outside and the rich man had also closed the door. So he didn't see Bhiman taking it away.

The next morning the rain stopped and the rich man came out of the house. He was surprised to find that the huge metal vessel was not there. "Who took it?" he wondered. It was a costly vessel and he was at a loss as to what to do. He started making enquiries. But the people whom he asked, said that none other than Eroor Bhiman could lift it, and since he had come there last night, he might have taken it.

The rich man went to Bhiman's house. The vessel was lying in his courtyard. When asked, Bhiman replied, "You didn't give me an umbrella. So I brought it to save myself from the rain. Now you can take it back."

But it was a problem to take it back. So he requested Bhiman to help him, to carry it home. Bhiman agreed, saying, "I shall carry it back to your house, on condition that you would feed me to my heart's content." The rich man promised to give him a feast. The vessel was carried back. The rich man asked his servants to prepare a sumptuous meal for Bhiman, who now happily started eating. Rice had to be prepared in that big vessel itself because the servants knew the capacity of Bhiman. In the process whatever grain the rich man had stored for the year for his household use, disappeared in no time !

RAMU'S EAR-RINGS

RAMU, A YOUNG MAN wanted to wear ear-rings. He approached his father and requested him to get two ear-rings made for him. Ramu was his only son and his father's pet. The father called a good goldsmith and asked him to make two ear-rings for his son. After four days the goldsmith brought a fine pair of ear-rings, inlaid with precious stones. The father gave it to Ramu and he was very happy. He always wore them.

One day he had to cross a ferry. He was sitting on one side of an open boat and while the boat was in the middle of the river the screw of one of his ear-rings came out and the ear-ring fell in the river. Ramu was very much distressed, more so because by no means it could be retrieved. The river was very deep and the ear-ring was a tiny thing.



Ramu went and told his father about it. The father was equally vexed. It was a costly thing and he had spent a good deal of money for making it. He asked him, "Can you please show me where exactly you lost it?" "Of course," replied the son, "Please come along with me."

Both of them went in a boat and just when they reached midstream Ramu uncrewed the other ear-ring and dropped it in the water. "Look," he said; "this is the exact place where I lost the ear-ring and it went down like this."

Thus Ramu lost both his ear-rings. His father looked on at him, astounded at his son's idiocy.

FATHER'S LAST ADVICE

AN OLD MAN HAD six sons. The sons were always quarreling among themselves. They were not paying any heed to the advice of the father to remain united. The father fell ill and was about to die. He called the sons to bring some twigs. When they brought the twigs he asked them to break them to pieces, which they could do easily. Then the old man asked his sons to bring six more twigs. He asked them to bundle the twigs together. They did so and then the father asked them to break the bundle. Each son tried, but couldn't break the bundle.



The father laughed and said, 'Look! It was very easy to break the twigs when you broke them one by one. But when you bundled them together none could break them. This is a lesson in life. If you remain united no harm will come to you. Union is strength. But if you remain single you will break. So after my death please remain united and then, no one can harm you and you will prosper.'

The old man died after giving this advice. And the sons always remembered their father's last advice and remained united.

ELEPHANT AND THE TAILOR

THERE WAS ONCE A clever elephant, Its 'Mahout' used to take it every morning for a bath in the river. There were shops on both sides of the road leading to the river. One of the shops, was owned by a tailor. Every day the tailor gave a banana to the elephant when it passed that way. It became a habit for the elephant to stand in front of the shop for the banana.



One day the tailor decided to fool the elephant. That day, as usual, the elephant extended its trunk to receive the banana. But this time it only got a prick with the tailor's needle. Over and above the pain the elephant also felt insulted. Without showing any anger it quietly went to the river for its usual bath. While taking its bath an idea struck the elephant. After finishing his bath the elephant filled its trunk with some dirty water. When it reached the tailor's shop the elephant saw the tailor, who was still laughing. Immediately the elephant raised its trunk and emptied the entire amount of dirty water on the tailor's head. Not only the tailor, but also some clothes kept on his table, got drenched with the dirty water.

Thereafter, without turning this side or that, the elephant went its way. The 'Mahout,' sitting on the elephant, laughed and said, " Well done my boy. You have paid him back in the same coin!"

FATE

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a wealthy man. He built a huge mansion and stayed in it with his wife and family. Even though he was rich, he was very generous and helped all those who approached him for help. Not far away from the rich man's house, a poor man lived in a thatched hut. The poor man used to pass by the house of the rich man everyday.

One day the rich man's wife was sitting by the side of her husband on the terrace. The rich man's wife too, was extremely kind-hearted and she told her husband, "Look! that poor man is going down the road. His clothes are tattered and from his very look you can make out that he is half-starved. Why can't you call him and give him some money."

'But he has not asked for any money from me," he replied,; "Some honest people will not accept money if offered. He seems to be such kind of man. So it is awkward on my part to offer him money straightaway. Suppose he turns round and says, 'If you are a wealthy man, keep the money with you. I don't want your money.' What would happen then?"

"Some people are born poor. It is their fate. Well, I shall do one thing. Instead of giving him some money, I shall keep some gold coins on his way. He will not know that it is my money. If he sees them, he may take the gold coins and will live happily for the rest of his life," the rich man planned, with his wife. "All right, do that," his wife said.

The next day the rich man saw the poor man at a distance. He knew that he would pass that way. So he kept some gold coins on a piece of cloth on the road and went inside the house. It was a lonely road. The poor man approached the bundle. At that very moment, an idea struck him. When he was about to reach the place where the coins were kept, he thought, "What will I do if I become blind ? Will I be able to walk on the road like a normal man with eyes shut ?" He decided to try it. And he passed the way closing both his eyes until he crossed that particular spot.

The rich man told his wife, "See what he has done ! Didn't I tell, you ? He is not destined to get the money. It is God's will that he will lead his life as a poor man."

CONFESSION

ONCE A MAN belonging to the Christain community approached a church priest for confession. The priest asked him whether he had committed any sin. "Father," he replied, "One day when I was going along the road I saw a rope and I took it. I don't know to whom it belonged." "That doesn't matter. Anything else ?" asked the priest. "Father, there was a cow at the end of the rope. I didn't know to whom it belonged and I took it home," said the man. "Is that so ? What did you do with the cow ?" enquired the priest. "I sold it to someone," he replied gently. Then the priest advised him. "Since you don't know who the real owner of the cow was, do one thing. Give its price to the church as a donation."



"But father, how can I do that now ? I have spent the amount," he told the priest." Alright, have you committed any other sin ? " asked the priest." Oh! I have taken four chakrams (coins) belonging to somebody," the man replied. "If you know to whom the chakrams belonged you return them to him," the priest advised him."I shall give them to you, father." "No, No, I don't want it," said the priest.

The man went home and told his wife what all happened in the church. At the end he said, "See, these four chakrams ! I am giving them to you. While I was speaking with the priest, these chakrams were lying in a bundle on the priest's table. I cleverly took them. And the priest told me that he doesn't want them and I may take them. So, I have taken the money. Now, I am giving them to you as a present!"

VOMITTED A CROW

A VILLAGER ONCE WENT to the town. There he had a merchant friend. The merchant friend told him all news of the town. Among them was this exciting news: "Near this place someone vomitted three crows." The villager was very much surprised to hear this. He enquired, "Is it true ? Who told you this ?" "Oh! It's that wholesale dealer. When I went to him last month to buy something, he told me about this. First, I too didn't believe it, but it's true. If you want you may ask him. I shall give you his address," the merchant said to his friend, and he gave him the wholesaler's address.

The villager found out the wholesale dealer. He asked him, "Is it true that a person vomitted three crows ?" The wholesale merchant replied, "Yes, its true. But it's not three crows; only two." The villager enquired, "Who told you this ?" " Oh! it's a landlord. If you want you may ask him," so saying, the merchant gave him the address of the landlord. With some difficulty he found out the landlord and asked him about the strange incident.

"Yes," replied the landlord. "It's true, but the person didn't vomit two crows, but only one." "Who gave you this information ?" he asked the landlord. "It's the goldsmith who resides in the lane nearby. You may ask him," said the landlord.

The villager went to see the goldsmith. The goldsmith told him, "What you heard is partly true. It was my wife. She vomitted something like a small crow. Later on I found out that it was a burnt cake."

The villager was pleased, at long last, to know the actual fact. Yet he was surprised, to see what shape truth can take, travelling from mouth to mouth!

AMMANNOOR PARAMESWARA CHAKIAR

AMMANNOOR PARAMESWARA CHAKIAR was a reputed Kathakali artiste. In Kathakali dance-drama the actors and actresses do not speak, but by their gestures, movements of hands and fingers, and facial expressions, they make the audience follow the story.



Those were days, when the British ruled India. One evening, an English Collector was sitting in his garden with his wife. His pet dog strayed to the road and started barking. After a few minutes, the dog came back howling, as if in great agony. The Collector went outside to see whether anyone had thrown a stone at the dog. There was only one man on the street. The Collector called him and asked, 'Did you beat my dog or throw any stone at it?'

The passer-by was Parameswara Chakiar. He replied, "Sir, the dog came to bite me, but I took a stone and made gestures of throwing it at the dog, that's all. The dog thought that the stone hit him and then started moaning."

The Collector didn't believe it. He was very angry; more so, because he thought that Chakiar was telling a lie. "But the dog ran back in full speed and howled as if it was badly hurt. I can't believe your story. You are telling a lie," said the collector, with rage.

"Sir, I am not telling a lie. I am a Kathakali actor. I only enacted a piece of Kathakali and pretended as if I was throwing the stone at the dog. If you want, I shall convince you that I am telling the truth," replied Chakiar. "All right, convince me and then only I will let you go," said the Collector.

"Alright, Sir, I shall demonstrate. Please sit on your easy-chair, as before. I shall enact a scene from Kathakali," and saying this, he came in front of the Englishman, who sat on his easy chair. In the meanwhile, Chakiar started showing a portion of Kathakali, where Kailasa mountain is lifted and dropped on the ground. The actor pretended as if the mountain was being lifted from its place and dropped on the Collector's head. The piece was enacted so competently that the Collector thought that a mountain was actually falling on his head. He wriggled out of his easy chair and in that attempt he fell down.

The Collector then realised that Chakiar was telling the truth. He appreciated his prowess, congratulated him and gave him a handsome reward.

PAKKANAR'S STICK

PAKKANAR WAS A wise man. He belonged to a low caste, 'Parish.'

One day he was sitting in front of his hut. Two high caste Brahmins were going that way. Pakkanar bowed before them, and asked them where they were going. From their bags and other things he could guess that they were going on a pilgrimage.



"We are going to Kasi," they replied. "I am not lucky enough to go to Kasi. Kindly dip at least my stick in the Ganga and bring it back for me," he requested them. "No problem. We shall dip it in the Ganga and bring it back to you when we return," they said. Pakkanar ran inside his hut, brought the stick and gave it to him. After going to Kasi they dipped Pakkanar's stick in the Ganga. When they dipped it, it was not coming out of the water as if someone was pulling it down. So they left it in the water and came away.

On their return they narrated the story to Pakkanar. He said, "Doesn't matter, The stick is here itself." Then he went near an old well and said, "Please return my stick to me." At that time slowly the stick came out of the well. The Brahmins understood its meaning. Water is the same anywhere in the world. People who are ardent devotees of God, need not go to Kasi for *moksha* or salvation. They can as well pray, from where they are.

OLD MAN'S GOAT

AN OLD MAN HAD a goat. Daily, it used to give four measures of milk. One day the goat was missing. The old man searched everywhere, but couldn't find the goat. Actully, it had gone deep into a forest in search of food. It was getting dark and the old man was very sad. If he lost the goat, it would be a real loss to him. He was earning a good amount of money by selling the goat's milk. It fetched more price than cow's milk. Goat's milk was good for children and parents didn't mind spending more money for it. Secondly he, was also very much attached to it. Not finding it anywhere, the old man prayed, "If I get back the goat I shall give it as a gift to the man who brings it to me." He took this vow in the presence of the village elders.



The next morning a man brought the goat. This man had gone to the forest to cut wood and when he saw the goat which had strayed away in the forest he knew that it was the old man's goat. So he brought it to him. When someone reminded him of his vow, the old man said, "What! How can I give a goat which gives me so much milk as a gift?" But the villagers were adamant. They said, "You should honour your words. Didn't you promise that you would gift it to the person who finds it? You should be true to your words."

The old man was very clever. "All right, I shall gift it to him tomorrow," he said. And he turned to the person who found it and said, "I shall gift it tomorrow. Please come tomorrow." When he went away, the old man caught hold of a mouse and put it inside a box. The next morning he tied the box around the goat's neck.

The other man came to receive his gift. The old man said, "You can take the goat free. I gift it to you. But I have tied a box containing a mouse around its neck. The mouse costs five thousand rupees. If you want the goat, you will have to take it along with the mouse. You can take the goat free of cost as I have promised, but you will have to pay for the mouse."

The greedy man was thunder-struck. He had come with high hopes of getting the goat, but he was not prepared to pay the huge price for the dirty mouse. He went home dejected while the old man, gleefully retained his goat.

FIT PUNISHMENT

ONE DAY A JACKAL fell into an old well. There was not much water in the well. There was only knee-deep water and the jackal didn't die. But he couldn't climb up in spite of his best efforts.

A goat came that way. It peeped into the well and saw the jackal. The goat asked, "What are you doing there?" The jackal replied, "Oh! this well contains sweet, jaggery water, I have had my fill. I can't drink more. It is very sweet. Do you want to taste it?" "Yes, of course," the goat replied. "Then jump in" advised the jackal." The goat jumped in. In a second the jackal jumped on the goat's back and jumped out of the well. The goat realised its mistake. It called for help from the jackal to get out of the well. But the jackal ran away smiling and with the pride of having cheated the poor goat.



On the way he met a cat. Most sarcastically he told the cat, "Oh ! your lot is really pitiable. For food you have to depend on left-overs. You have to go to the backside of houses, hotels or garbage dumps for your food. I catch foul-Kill and eat them." When he was boasting like this some hunting dogs came that way. The cat was clever. It jumped up on a tree. But the jackal had nowhere to go. Even though it tried to run, the hunting dogs overpowered it and killed it. All his slyness, could not save him from his doom.

A FOOLISH TIGER

A TORTOISE AND A jackal were good friends. The jackal lived in the forest and, the tortoise in a pond nearby. The jackal's cave was near the pond.

One day both the friends were talking merrily about news of common interest. Then a tiger came that way. When the jackal saw the tiger he ran away and hid himself in his cave. The poor tortoise couldn't escape, as it can't move fast. The tiger caught hold of him and began to beat it with his paws. But the tortoise had a hard shell over its body and that protected him. The tiger continued to claw the shell but couldn't break it. It started scratching and biting the shell with no result. The jackal was seeing all this, hiding in his cave. He wanted to play a trick on the tiger and at the same time save the poor tortoise. So it came out of his cave and posing as a well-wisher of the tiger said, "His shell is very hard. Push him into the pond. When the tortoise falls in water his shell will become soft; and in course of time, as soft as butter. Then you can eat him, not otherwise."



The foolish tiger believed the jackal. He gently pushed the tortoise into the pond. And the tortoise dived and escaped the threat to his life. The foolish tiger stood on the bank and the tortoise swam to the middle of the tank diving deep into the water.

THREE THIEVES

IN A PLACE CALLED Kodakkad there were three thieves. They robbed people and led a very bad life. One day, with their stolen money in bags, they met at a secret spot and decided to celebrate the occasion. So, one of the thieves said, "Wait here. I shall go and bring some liquor. We will drink and be merry. There after we will have a feast."

"All right," the other two said, "We will wait here. You go and bring good liquor." When he left, one of the other two said, "If we kill that fellow we can take the bags containing his earnings. He has got a lot of stolen money with him." "It is an excellent idea," the other thief said; "Let him come. We will pounce on him and kill him."

The thief who went to buy liquor thought in a different way. He thought, if the other two were killed, he would get all their money, and could live happily for the rest of his life. 'I need not go for this risky and dangerous job anymore. I will add some poison in the liquor and serve it to them. If they drink it, they will die,' he thought. So, after purchasing liquor, he also bought some poison, mixed it in the liquor and took it to the other two thieves.



As soon as he returned, the other two thieves jumped on him and killed him. "Now we will enjoy the drink better," said one of the other two. Then with all the bags they went to a secluded place, and started drinking liquor. Very soon, both of them fell dead. Greed killed them all.

VILWAMANGALAM AND CHINTAMONI

THERE WAS ONCE a young Brahmin priest who belonged to a house called Vilwamangalam. So he was generally called Vilwamangalam. He was in love with a lady of bad repute called Chintamoni. She belonged to the Devadasi caste. The priest was so deeply in love with her that every evening he wanted to meet her. On one auspicious day he decided not to go to her. That day he had to perform certain ceremonies. The ceremonies were over in the morning, and when evening approached, he desired to go to the lady's house. But all of a sudden, the sky darkened and there was lightning, thunder and heavy downpour.

The lady was staying on the other bank of the river and it was almost impossible to cross the river when it was utterly dark and raining heavily. But the desire to see Chintamoni was so great that the priest didn't mind the rain and storm. Vilwamangalam went to the river side. There was no boat on this bank of the river. He waited for sometime. Then, he saw something like a boat, floating in the river. He caught hold of it, sat on it and with both his hands rowed to the other bank of the river. In that bad weather, Chintamoni was not expecting Vilwamangalam. So she had bolted all the doors and even doors of the courtyard which was facing the river, and went to bed.

Vilwamangalam saw that the door was bolted from inside and in the rain and storm nobody would hear if he knocked at the door. So he decided to climb the wall. But the wall was too steep and he couldn't scale it. Then he saw a rope hanging on the wall and slowly jumped down to the courtyard. He knocked at the door and Chintamoni opened it. She was surprised to see Vilwamangalam standing there in the rain, completely drenched. She let him in and asked him to change his clothes. Thereafter, she rebuked him for taking the risk of coming there in such a bad weather. Vilwamangalam narrated to her how he reached her place.

By that time the rain had stopped, Chintamoni was almost sure that Vilwamangalam did not come by any boat, because no boat would be available when it had been raining so heavily. She went out, but to her surprise saw a big snake hanging on the wall of her courtyard. She knew that Vilwamangalam had made use of the snake to climb the wall thinking that it was rope! Chintamoni scared away the snake and went to the river bank. There

she saw a dead body tied to a tree. She at once knew that Vilwamangalam had made use of the corpse to cross the river. In pitch darkness and his hurry to reach her house, he had not cared for anything! She went back to her house and told Vilwamangalam, "Due to your love for me, what all risks did you



take !" She explained to him that it was not a boat but a corpse which he used to cross the river and the rope he used to climb the boundary wall, into the courtyard of Chintamani's house, was actually a snake. Then she pointed to a picture of Sri Krishna which was hung on the wall other house. "Transfer this love for me, to him. Only that will bring you happiness. Otherwise you will ruin yourself. You will get perpetual happiness only if you love God and serve him. All other happiness is temporary and will not last long."

Vilwamangalam looked at the picture and he was overwhelmed by a new type of love. He forgot himself and started chanting hymns in Sanskrit in praise of Lord Krishna. Chintamani noted them down and this collection, came to be known as *Sri Krishna Kamamritham*, which is considered to be a sacred book. Vilwamangalam renounced all worldly pleasures and became a devotee of Lord Krishna. Later on he came to be called, 'Vilwamangalathu Swamiar.'

YOUNG PRIEST'S DREAM

IN A VILLAGE THERE, was a young Brahmin priest. After his normal *Puja* in the temple, he used to attend to other work, which consisted of *srardh* (death anniversary) ceremony, house-warming (*Griha Praveshd*) etc. His *Pooja* in the temple was over early in the morning, and so he had enough time at his disposal, for the other work. The people for whom he used to perform ceremonies of this type, always gave him money, vegetables, oil, rice-powder etc. That was the custom.

One day after performing a *srardh* ceremony in a house he got a huge quantity of rice-powder. He put it in a large earthen pot and placed the pot on his head. While on his way home he started day-dreaming 'I shall sell this rice-powder in the market....with the money I get I will buy a small lamb, I will keep the lamb in my house. The lamb will become a full grown goat. Then I will sell it and with the money purchase a calf. The calf will grow and become a cow. Soon it will deliver one or two calves, I will keep one calf with the cow and sell the other one and keep the money with me. Everyday I will sell the cow's milk and earn good money. If the first calf grows up to be a big fat bull, I will sell it. If it is a cow I will keep both the cows. If both the cows give me milk I will keep both the cows. If both the cows give me milk I will get double profit by the sale of milk, that and together with the money which I would amass by that time I will marry a nice girl.... In course of time she will deliver a boy... One day when I return home I will see my wife scolding and beating my son. Then I will take a stick and hit her hard.....'

The priest was so immersed in his day-dream, that he struck the earthen pot kept on his head with a stick he was carrying with him. The pot broke into pieces and all the rice powder fell down on the road. That was the end to all his dreams!

RAMU AND KOMU

RAMU AND KOMU were neighbours. Ramu was an honest God-fearing man and Komu was just the opposite. But Ramu was very poor and he had a number of children. He had no proper work, whereas Komu was a landlord and a rich man. Even though both were friends, Komu never helped Ramu in times of difficulties. Neither did he visit him.

Ramu was a devotee of Shiva. One day he felt so depressed that he wanted to commit suicide. So he jumped into the river to drown himself. But due to unbearable suffocation he came up. Then God took pity on him and gave him three coconuts. He said to the dejected Ramu, "Whenever you want anything, you will get it, if you break these coconuts." And then He disappeared.

Ramu returned home, broke one coconut and washed for a fine house. Suddenly, in place of the old dilapidated house, a big house, appeared. His wife and children were astonished to see it. Then he broke another coconut and washed for a fertile bit of paddy land. The next moment a rich piece of land in which rice grew abundantly, appeared right behind his house, which, until now was a barren land. Finally, he broke the last coconut and wished for plenty of money. And ten bags of money appeared before him. He and his family were amazed to see these miracles and they profusely thanked Lord Shiva for his blessings.

But Komu was envious of his neighbour's sudden prosperity. He paid a visit to him and asked him how he got all this wealth. Ramu didn't hide anything from his friend. He told the whole story to Komu.

This gave Komu an idea. He prayed to Lord Shiva and jumped into the river. Then God appeared and gave three coconuts to him also. Komu returned home with the dream of becoming a millionaire. Just when he was about to break a coconut a beggar entered the courtyard of his house. He asked for food in a rancous voice, which Komu didn't like. So, when he broke his coconut, he said to the beggar, "This is your head." As soon as he said this, he observed a change in his person. He had a beggar's ugly head on his shoulders. Similarly, small heads resembling the head of the beggar appeared at the tip of his fingers and toes. Out of desperation, he broke the second coconut and prayed to Shiva, "Please remove all these heads." The heads disappeared, but he

became a headless body. He rolled on the ground screaming all the while. Luckily his hand touched the other coconut. He took it and struck it on the ground. Desperately he prayed again, "Oh Lord! Please save me from these troubles. Hereafter I shall be a good man like Ramu. Please give back my head to me!" Thereafter he regained his head and all was normal.



Komu knew that it was Lord Shiva Himself, who had come as a beggar. No good came to Komu from those coconuts, except that he became an object of ridicule for all persons in the village. But he became a completely changed man.

KAYAMKULAM KOCHUNNY STORIES

(1) AN EXPERT FENCER

KAYAMKULAM, IS A town in south Kerala. About two centuries ago there lived a man called Kochunny, in Keerikad near Kayamkulam. He was popularly known as 'Kayamkulam Kochunny.'

Kayamkulam Kochunny was a devout Muslim. He was noted for his chivalry and kindness to the poor. So the poor people always held him in high esteem. Needy people went to him for help and he helped them generously. But he was ruthless against misers, money-lenders and cruel landlords. Kayamkulam Kochunny was born to very poor parents. After his father's death, he had to make his own living and went about in search of work. Kochunny first went to Evoor, another place near Kayamkulam. There he came across a kind gentleman. He helped him with food and work. The latter also got him a job as servant in a merchant's shop. Kochunny was very strong and he did very hard work. This pleased his master.

Near the place where he was working, there was Kalari, i.e. a gymnasium, where the art of fencing was taught by a *Guru*. This *Guru* was also a Muslim, but somehow he didn't like Kochunny, probably thinking that this young man, would outbeat him in strength one day; or he might have thought that the poor boy wouldn't be able to pay his fees. But Kochunny wouldn't give up; stealthily he used to go the Kalari, hide behind a tree and watch the training, being imparted by the *Guru* to his disciples. One day the teacher came to know of this. He put some questions about fencing to Kochunny. He gave satisfactory answers. The *Guru* was very much impressed and he took him as his disciple. Very soon an opportunity came to him to save his master. Once the master was going by boat by the back waters, when his boat was caught in a storm. The boatman could not control it and it was drifting away. Kochunny saw this, jumped into the water, swam upto the boat and got in. He took the oars and guided the small boat to a safe place.

One day the merchant's customer urgently needed jaggery or *Gurh*. He had to prepare a feast the next day and *Gurh* was required for that purpose. As it was night-time the shop was closed. So, the merchant called Kochunny, and

asked him to go with the customer and give the required quantity of jaggery. The shop was somewhat far away. As they reached the shop, Kochunny realised that he had forgotten to take the keys of the shop. He had kept it somewhere in the house. Only the outside door of the shop was locked; inside, doors of the shop were only bolted, but not locked. Kochunny jumped over the building, entered the central courtyard, took out the jaggery and gave it to the customer.

This, no doubt, pleased the merchant, but at the same time annoyed him. As long as Kochunny was around, there was apparently no security, he thought and being a poor man, Kochunny might one day enter his shop at night and apparently, steal things. So, most reluctantly, he dispensed with Kochunny's



services. The merchant was sorry to miss him. And Kochunny too was equally sorry to leave the service of the merchant, who had helped him at a time when help was absolutely needed.

Thereafter Kochunny didn't serve any one else. He took to burglary and highway robbery. Soon he became the leader of a gang of robbers, by the dint of his friendly nature, and his expertise as a fencer, which he had learnt at the feet of his *Guru*, at the Kalari.

(II) LANDLORD LEARNT A LESSON

THERE WAS A notorious miser in Keerikad, Kochunny's native place. He was a landlord and ill-treated his tenants and fleeced money from them. He was also cruel to his servants.

The miser knew that Kochunny would attack him one day and so he posted guards at his house and took bodyguards with him when he went out. But Kochunny cleverly worked out a plan for a burglary in the miser's house. It was summer time and the landlord and his family used to sleep outside, in the open *verandah* of the house. Kochunny came to know of this and he called out his men and said, "At any cost we have to attack the miser tonight. We have to make a hole in the back-wall of the house at the dead of night. No one should hear any sound. The guards will be sleeping. They are four in number and so eight of us should keep a watch over them. If they try to get up, you should pounce upon them. The rest of us will make the hole in the wall and enter the house."

The plan was carried out ably. They entered the room where the jewel box was kept, removed all the jewellery from it and, also the cash which they could get easily. But somehow the miser came to know that the burglars had got in and so he and his wife went inside to see. Suddenly the children, finding themselves alone gave a shriek. Kochunny immediately took both the children, ran to the fields and left them there. Being a strong man he could do it easily. Then he ran back to the house by another way.

Everybody ran to save the children. They were rescued and taken to the house. But in the meanwhile, Kochunny and his men had left the house with a large booty, which he would distribute amongst the poor, in the village. The landlord, robbed of all his wealth, was now bankrupt. He was taught a deserving lesson for being a miser, and for being cruel to his servants.

(III) KOCHUNNY IN DISGUISE

IN KAYAMKULAM, THERE was a rich money-lender. His name was Krishna Pattar. A person by name Krishna Kurup came to see him one day. He was urgently in need of a thousand rupees. He had brought with him three thousand rupees worth of gold jewellery as a security and told Patter, "Please lend me a thousand rupees for some time. You may keep this jewellery as security and when I pay back the loan, please return it to me."

"Alright," said Krishna Patter; "I shall lend you the money, but you will have to give me fifty per cent interest per annum." Patter knew that Kurup was in dire need of money and he could safely ask for the exorbitant rate of interest. As a matter of fact he wanted to exploit the situation.

Kochunny came to know of this deal. One evening Krishna Pattar went to the river for a bath. After his bath he came back and told his wife, "Please keep this bag in your strong box. Krishna Kurup has returned the money. Give me his jewellery. I shall return it to him." Patter's wife did as she was told. Pattar took the bag containing the jewellery and told his wife that Kurup was waiting at the bathing ghat.

Two months passed. Krishna Kurup himself came with the money and asked Pattar to return the pledged ornaments. Pattar called his wife and said, "Please keep this bag inside our safe and bring back the jewellery of Krishna Kurup. He has returned the loan." Patter's wife was astonished. "What?" she asked, "two months back you gave me a bag saying that Kurup has returned the money and the jewellery bag may be given to you. And you took it to the river side to be given to Krishna Kurup." Pattar had completely forgotten the incident. He said, "Yes now I remember. It was my mistake. Please bring me the bag of money kept in the safe. Let me open it and see." And when he opened it he found that it contained stones instead of coins. Pattar realised his mistake. He had to give the value of the jewellery to Kurup.

Some days later, a gentleman came to see Krishna Pattar. It was Kochunny in disguise. He gave the jewellery he had taken from the money-lender in the guise of Kurup, to Pattar and told him, "Hereafter please don't boast that your house is a fortress and nobody can enter it. Kochunny can take jewellery from your house, even without entering it." What happened was this: It was night-time when Kochunny met Pattar at the ghat. Kochunny had come in the guise

of Krishna Kurup. Pattar thought that nobody came to know about the deal except Kurup and himself, and so when the money was brought, there was no ground for suspicion. As Kochunny was standing at the river side,



Pattar's wife didn't see him. Kochunny gave Patter, a bag filled with pebbles and stones. Pattar in his excitement of having got back the money he had lent, alongwith an exhorbitant interest, carried it home hurriedly without looking into the bag. In turn he gave back to Kochunny, who came in the guise of Kurup, the bag containg jewellery that Kurup had kept with Patter as security for the loan. This was done, only to teach a lesson to Pattar, who was a miser and boasted of his money and his security.

(IV) KOCHUNNY'S END

KOCHUNNY HAD MARRIED a girl from his own community. It was an arranged marriage, in accordance with the wishes of his mother. But actually he was in love with a Hindu girl belonging to the Nair community. One day he had a quarrel with the Nair girl's mother and in a fit of temper he struck the old lady with an iron rod and she died.

A murder case was soon registered against him. But the police couldn't catch him easily. He always eluded them. In course of time the Magistrate of the place received strict orders from the Government to capture Kochunny dead or alive. The Magistrate tried a clever ruse. Secretly, he saw the Nair lady with whom Kochunny was in love. He promised that he would marry her if she helped in capturing Kochunny. She agreed because she thought that it would be better to be the wife of a Magistrate than to be the concubine of a burglar. So, that night when Kochunny came to her house to take his dinner, she gave him rice mixed with sleeping pills. Kochunny ate it and fell fast asleep. The Nair lady informed the police who immediately came, chained him and took him to prison.



That night when he woke up he understood what his beloved had done. But the next night itself, he managed to break his chains and escaped from the prison. Straightaway he went to the Nair lady's house. There he saw another man sleeping with her. He killed both of them, went home, and apologised to his legal wife for his past mistakes. Afterwards he remained faithful to her.

With a vengeance Kochunny started his old profession again and for three years none could catch him. The Government gave strict orders to the *Tahsildar* of Karthikappally to put an end to this scourge by fair or foul means. The *Tahsildar* lured some of Kochunny's close friends with handsome presents. One of them invited him for a lunch and he mixed opium with the food which was offered to Kochunny. So after taking his food, he fell into a stupor. The police was waiting for this. They put him in chains and sent him to the Central Jail in Trivandrum. Had he been tried, he would have been hanged. But he escaped gallows. Strangely he died in prison. It is believed, that he was slowly poisoned to death in prison by his adversaries, who were also undergoing prison sentences alongwith him.

OTHENAN STORIES

(I) AN INSULT TO OTHENAN'S MOTHER

OTHENAN was a soldier of repute and a legendary figure in north Kerala. He belonged to Thacholi family. From his infancy, he got a good training in wielding the sword and spear and in other martial arts from renowned *Gurus*.



Othenan belonged to a rich family but later on they became poor, as some wicked people grabbed much of their lands by foul means. On one such plot, previously owned by Othenan's family, the new landlord's servant boy was plucking coconuts. Customarily Othenan's family used to get two coconuts as a gift when coconuts were plucked.

So, as usual, Othenan's mother went to collect them. The servant boy rudely refused to give her even a single coconut. So she took two coconuts from the bunch of coconuts lying there and started walking home. The servant boy grew angry and threw a stem of a coconut tree which injured her. Blood oozed out of the wounds. She felt the insult more than the pain.

Othenan was at that time in Kalari, a school where martial arts was taught and practised. When he returned home, this sight greeted him. At once he went into the coconut grove, caught hold of the boy and tied him to a tree. This news spread throughout the village and many people gathered there. The boy's father came and asked the boy to apologise to Othenan. But Othenan said, "He should apologise to my mother and not to me."

Just then, Mathiloor Gurukkal, a renowned teacher in archery came that way. He came to know of the incident and gave his verdict. The servant boy was asked to apologise to Othenan's mother. The boy went to Othenan's mother and apologised to her. Some coconuts were also placed before her as an offering.

(II) CHEERUKUTTY

CHEERUKUTTY WAS Othenan's wife. Once she wanted to see Theyyattom, a type of ritual dance, at Chamundi Kavu, a temple which was at a considerable distance from her home. She was sure that Othenan would not give her permission to go there. So when Othenan was away she requested Komappan, his elder brother, to give her permission to go to the festival. Komappan said that he would talk to Othenan about it.

When Othenan returned home Komappan told him of his wife's wish and recommended that she be permitted to see the festival. Othenan was reluctant to give permission because the people who generally assembled there, were rough and rude. He did not like to expose his wife to their uncivil behaviour. Even though Othenan finally gave her permission to go, he asked his friend, Chathan to escort her.



What Othenan feared happened. Cheerukutty had to face the jeers of the ruffians on the road, as well as in the Kavu. The rich Nairs who had come there started talking freely and indulged in cruelly teasing her, until the poor lady started crying. But Othenan had followed her close behind. He was upset when he saw his wife in tears. At once he jumped forward and thrashed the ruffians who had insulted her. They fled without even turning back, as if struck by thunder.

(III) OTHENAN AND KUNJAN

OTHENAN WAS VERY fond of his younger brother, Kunjan. One day Othenan had to leave Kadathanad, his native place. He had to go to Thulunad, at present known as Karnataka. Since Othenan had many foes, he gave special instructions to his people to save Kunjan from them, in case they tried to harm him. He also told his wife, Cheerukutty about it.

In those days, Kadathanad was ruled by Kadathanad Thampuran (chief) and he hated Othenan. In Othenan's absence he invited Kunjan to his palace. It was the chief's invitation and he had to go. No one thought that the chief would do any harm to the boy. When the Thampuran saw Kunjan he greeted



him affectionately. After giving him a sumptuous meal, he led him throughout the palace to show him all places inside it. Kunjan saw a tomb like structure

and he enquired what it was. The chief replied, "Oh! that is a new tomb that I have built. If you want to see it I shall show it to you." Saying this, he opened the doors of the tomb. He showed him the way to enter the tomb and as soon as Kunjan entered it, Thampuran closed the door and locked him in. His intention was to starve the boy to death.

Kunjan spent two days inside the tomb without food or even water. The third day morning he heard some footsteps. Some instinct told him that it was his sister-in-law Cheerukutty. "Sister," he called out, "Wicked Thampuran has trapped me." Cheerukutty was expecting some trouble and that was why she had stealthily gone there. She immediately went to the temple of their family Goddess and prayed, "Have pity on us. The young boy's life is in danger. Please save him; please bring my husband here quickly. If you grant my request I shall pave your floor with gold."

That night Othenan had a dream. In the dream someone was standing before him, saying, "Go to Kadathanad at once. Your little brother's life is in danger. Save him !" Othenan woke up and he thought that it was a bad dream. He didn't attach much significance to it. He was feeling sleepy and he closed his eyes. Then he felt that someone struck him hard. So he decided to start at once. He reached Kadathanad within a few hours. From Cheerukutty, he came to know all that had happened in his absence. At once he went to the tomb where his brother was confined. He called him by his name. "Oh ! Is that my brother ?" Kunjan asked from the tomb. "Yes," replied Othenan. And then Othenan said, "Stand away from the door !" With one kick he broke the door of the tomb. He embraced his brother. Thereafter he went straight to the Thampuran's palace and challenged Thampuran for a duel. Very soon the wicked chief's head was seen rolling on the ground.

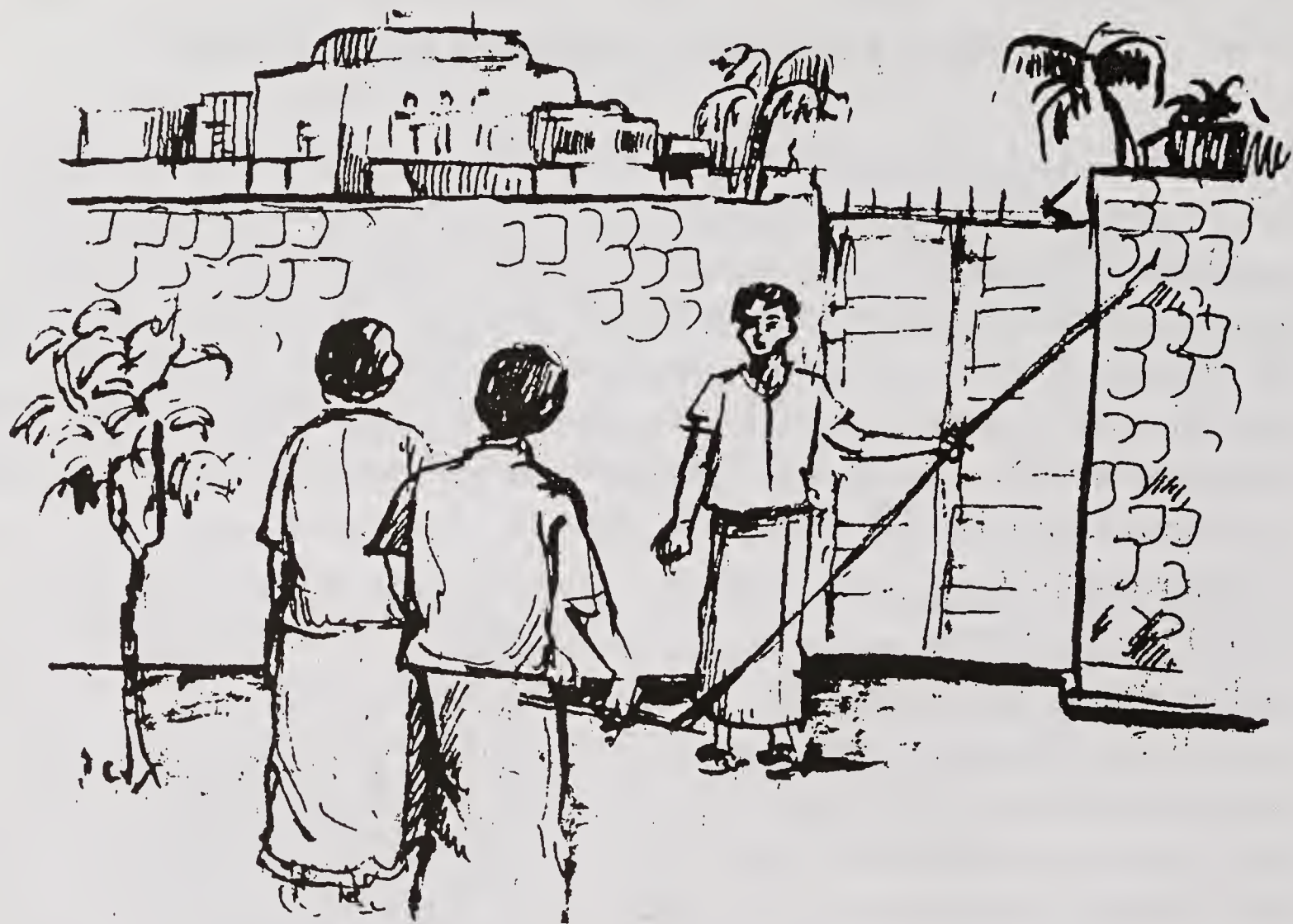
(IV) OTHENAN AND KELAPPAN

AT WHYNAAD, SITUATED near Othenan's place, there lived a warrior by name Kelappan. He was a strong man, but at the same time, very cruel. He constructed a huge fortress and terrorised the people around. The fort was heavily guarded. Kelappan's fame spread far and wide. Othenan was eager to see the fort, the people talked so much about. He spoke about his wish to his elder brother Komappan who discouraged him from going there. But Othenan pleaded with him and at last Komappan agreed. Othenan, however, took his best friend Chappan also along with him.

When they reached the fort the guards stopped them. They didn't allow him to enter it. Othenan saw a tree which had branches overhanging into the fort. Stealthily he climbed the tree and went inside, while Chappan remained outside. By that time, it had become dark and Othenan took a walk around the fort. While doing so he saw a small building which was locked. Othenan felt very tired and decided to sleep in the *varandah* of that building. Very soon he fell asleep. Someone saw him and informed Kelappan about the strange visitor. Kelappan came out and immediately recognised Othenan. He ordered his servant to remove Othenan's sword. Othenan was fast asleep and didn't know what was happening. Without waking him up Kelappan's servants bound his hands and feet with iron chains and he was carried inside the building which was really a tomb. He was locked up in it and the servants went away. Othenan still continued to sleep. When at last he woke up he found himself in utter darkness and he couldn't see anything. He knew that he was in a dark room. He groped in the darkness, went up to the door, but found to his dismay, that the doors were made of iron and they were bolted from outside. At once he knew that his rival, Kelappan has trapped him and nothing much could be done, except to pray to his family Goddess Kavilamma, who never let him down in times of difficulties.

Chappan, who was waiting outside the fortress, suspected some foul play, since his friend Othenan did not return even after a long time. So he returned to Kadathanad, and arranged for a thousand soldiers to go to Whynaad. He too returned to Whynaad, disguised as a *Yogi*. The *Yogi* requested for an interview with Kelappan which was granted. Before that, he had secretly ascertained from someone in the fort that Othenan was caught and imprisoned in a tomb. The *Yogi* was able to impress Kelappan, who had great respect for holy men.

Kelappan gave him an honourable place, near his throne. During the course of their talk he told Kelappan "You have imprisoned an evil fellow and the earlier you get rid of him, the better. Fix up a date and hang him."



Kelappan was much amazed when he heard this. He had kept the capture of Othenan as a secret and so he thought that the *Yogi* really had divine powers. He replied, I am very much thankful to you for giving me this advice. I shall execute him tomorrow morning itself." Then the *Yogi* said, "I would like to see him before the execution." Kelappan gladly gave permission. Othenan was very glad to see his friend. He could recognise his voice, when he spoke to him. He knew that Chappan was very clever and he would find out a way to free him. The prisoner asked for some water and the *Yogi* said that he should be allowed to have his last wish for which the prisoner's chains should be removed. There was no danger of his escape, as he was held by four soldiers. The chains were removed and in a split second Othenan jumped and managed to get a sword from a soldier. The *Yogi* also snatched a sword from one of the soldiers and both of them exhibited such skill in fighting, that none of the soldiers dared to approach them. In the meanwhile, the thousand soldiers arranged by Chappan from Kadathanad assembled. They broke into the fort without much resistance. Kelappan's soldiers were routed and Othenan killed Kelappan. They captured the fort and Othenan profusely thanked Chappan for saving his life.

(V) NAMBIAR TAUGHT A LESSON

KUNHIKUMBA WAS OTHENAN'S niece. She was very pretty and was the wife of Chandu. She wanted to go to Kozhikode to see the Zamorin (the Raja of Kozhikode). But according to custom girls of north Kerala were forbidden to go to South Kerala. Moreover Kozhikode was far away and so her husband and her mother-in-law were strongly against it. Still Kunhikumba wanted to go and the head of the family Komappan permitted her to go. Chappan and some others went with her.

There was one Nambiar of Kytheril house who was a rich and powerful local chief. He happened to see Kunhikumba and was struck by her beauty and grace. He wanted to marry her. But Kunhikumba was very much devoted to her husband and was not at all prepared for the alliance even though a second marriage was common in those days. But the Nambiar was very powerful and influential and he managed to carry off Kunhikumba. Chappan was not able to prevent it. However, he requested Nambiar to release the girl and come to the girl's place on an auspicious day to have the marriage celebrated there. Nambiar agreed to the proposal. And Kunhikumba was persuaded to return home instead of proceeding to Kozhikode.

As promised, Nambiar arrived at Thacholi house on the appointed day. The marriage ceremony took place in all pomp and grandeur. The bride was brought in, beautifully dressed and the function was over. The bride and bridegroom were ushered into the nuptial chamber. Nambiar told his newly wedded bride, "Kunhikumba I shall take you to the Zamorin tomorrow. Don't you worry." Suddenly, Othenan, dressed as the bride, came forward and said, "You rascal! you will not covet another man's wife anymore!" Saying this Othenan took his sword, which was nicely hidden in the room and cut off Nambiar's head.

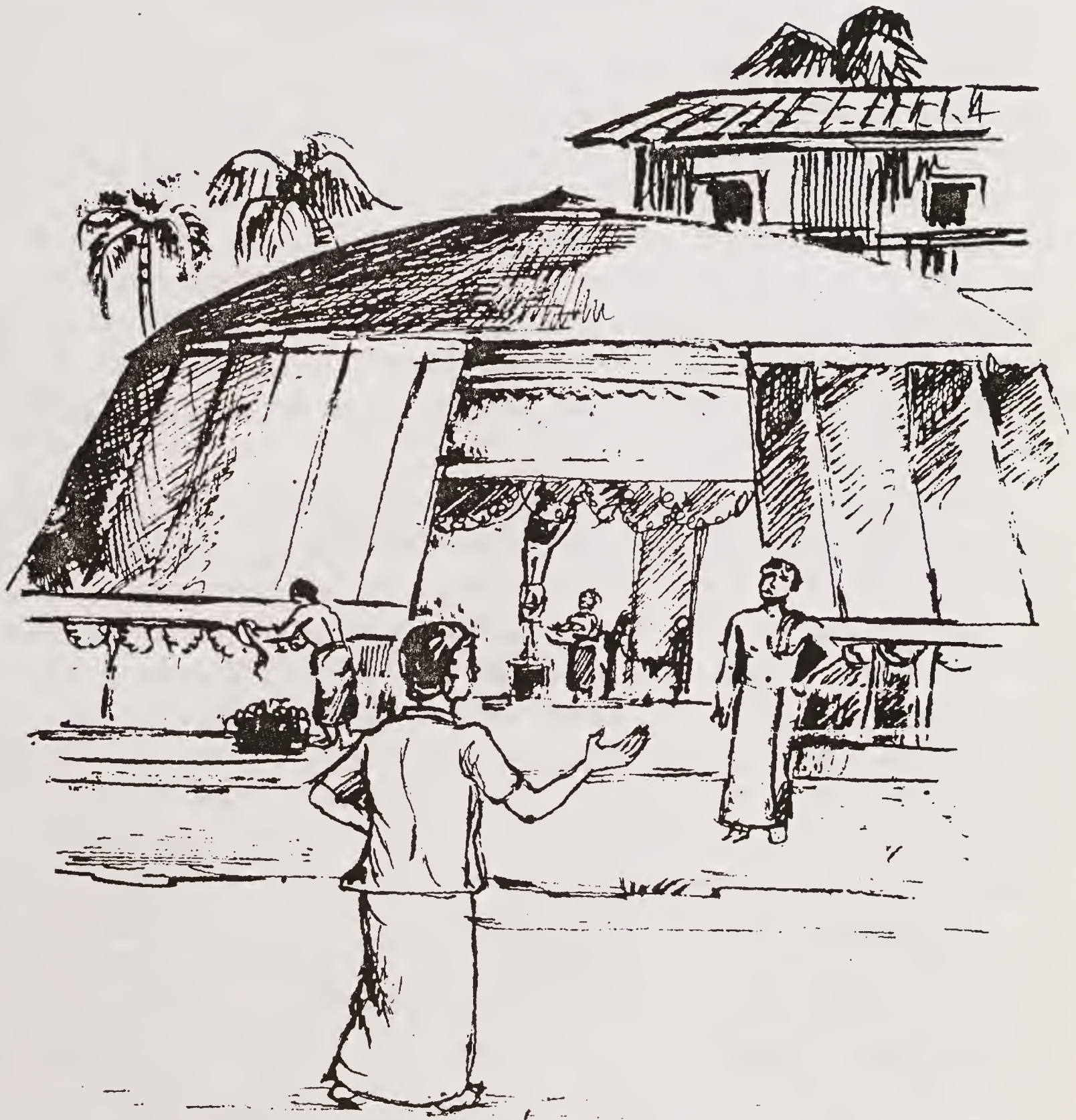
(VI) A FIGHT TO THE LAST

OHENAN'S ARCH RIVAL was Kathairoor Gurukkal. He too was an expert in fencing and had many disciples under him. He could put a small army in the field, if it came to a question of fight. But Othenan was considered to be stronger than Gurukkal and everyone acknowledged his superiority. So Gurukkal always wanted to have a trial of strength with Othenan. He wanted to establish that he was superior to Othenan. One day, Othenan was arranging to perform a religious festival and a huge shed was constructed in front of his house. It was also nicely decorated. Gurukkal came that way and passed some scornful remarks about the pandal and decorations. At first Othenan took it lightly, but Gurukkal persisted in making fun of Othenan and the preparations he had made. His intention was to pick up a quarrel with Othenan. Othenan knew it and he took up the challenge. A day was fixed for a fight. All people of Kadathanad were anxiously awaiting the fight. It was not just a fight between two warriors; the two great fighters and their pupils took part in it. It was going to be a small battle. Othenan's people were not pleased with the news. They knew that it was not an ordinary fight and it was fraught with danger. Both sides were equally strong and anything could happen.

The long awaited day dawned. It was a bright and clear day and the opponents faced each other in the Kalari battle field chosen for the fight. The fight started. Othenan's friend Chappan said he would fight Gurukkal and Othenan gave his consent. But very soon Chappan was overpowered by Gurukkal, and seeing this, Othenan took his place. The fight lasted long. The two champions used all their skill to defeat each other. It was a grim fight and the people witnessed the fight with bated breath. Both were experts, but at last Othenan managed to trip Gurukkal who fell on the ground. Very soon Othenan's sword cut off the enemy's head and the people cheered loudly. With head held high Othenan walked out of the battle field and Gurukkal's followers ran away. Othenan went straight to his house and bowed before his elder brother, Komappan who blessed him and congratulated him on his meritorious success. Then he wanted to see his wife Cheerukutty, who was very distressed when he went to take leave of her before the fight. But she could not be seen. He could only see his son, Ambady. By that time, Othenan's disciples had assembled in front of his house to congratulate their master. It was then that he remembered that he had forgotten to take his sword from the Kalari. So he

returned to the Kalari. While walking back to the Kalari a wicked ally of Gurukkal sent a bullet through his forehead. But the assassin couldn't escape because one of Othenan's trusted men sent an arrow at him which killed him.

The tragic news spread soon like wild fire and Othenan's friends and relatives gathered around him. They were in tears. But Othenan comforted them and told them that it was small wound and he wouldn't die due to that. Very soon blood oozed out of his deep wound and he was dying. Yet Othenan



consoled them by saying, "I have done my work and I am dying a soldier's death." He called his wife, but she was not there. No one could say where she had gone. Then he called his son and gave him his sword and shield. He uttered the name of his family diety, "Oh Goddess Kavilamma !" and he breathed his last.

NAMBUDIRI STORIES

(I) TRAIN JOURNEY

THE NAMBUDIRIS ARE high caste Brahmins in Kerala. They are known for their wit, humour and simplicity. Those were days, when trains were first introduced. One day a Nambudiri decided to enjoy a train journey. He had only seen a train at a distance. He liked its whistling, the smoke and the puffing noise it made, while moving on the rails. He used to look at the train with childish joy. A friend of his, who had the experience of a train journey, had many good things to say about it. That was why he too decided to go on a train journey. Further he had to visit his daughter, who was staying with her husband in another town. His place, and his daughter's place were connected by rail.

He boarded the train from Palakkad, his native town, and his destination was Kozhikode where his daughter resided. He had to go via Shoranur, which was a junction. The Nambudiri had taken a bag containing his clothes with him. Among other things in the bag, he had also kept his chellam or *paan* box. The Nambudiri was a rich man and he was travelling in a first class compartment. In the compartment there was only one more passenger, an Englishman. India at that time was governed by the British. The British officers would move from place to place by train or by boat in India, because these were the only means of transport then. The Nambudiri's co-traveller was a highly placed government officer. He was wearing a nice suit and from the very beginning he didn't like the Nambudiri, who was wearing his native dress, a dhoti and a towel on his shoulders—not even a shirt. In those days few people wore shirts — only a *vesthi* towel was used to cover the wearer's body. It was a coupe compartment and in it there was only a lower berth and upper berth.

The Englishman was sitting on the window seat and the Nambudiri next to him. The latter was enjoying the journey and he squatted on the seat, spreading his towel and he took out his pan box and kept it on his right hand side. The English officer was looking at these and the bare body of his co-passenger contemptuously.

When the train reached the midway station of Shornur, the Nambudiri decided to chew a *paan*. Chewing *paan* is an elaborate procedure in Kerala. He took out the betel leaves first cleaned them with his knife, applied lime, then areca-nut pieces and put the betel leaves in his mouth together with the nut pieces and chewed them. Then he put a few pieces of tobacco into his mouth. The Englishman was looking sarcastically at this exercise. When the tobacco is put in the month and chewed for some time, the chewer has to spit the saliva out. The glass window of the compartment was closed, but its glass was so clean that the Nambudiri thought it was open. So going near the window he spat. The *paan* fell on the suit of the Englishman. He became angry, got up and gave a hard slap on each cheek of the Nambudiri, who immediately realized his mistake and so didn't offer any resistance. He returned to his seat and sat quietly until he reached Kozhikode.

After getting down at the Kozhikode station, he went straight to his daughter's place. His daughter was very glad to see him. She enquired, "How was your train journey, father ? I hope you enjoyed it." The Nambudiri was very tired, yet replied, "Yes, yes, the journey was quite pleasant but for the slap I got at Shoranur. That was an unforgettable experience." Then his daughter asked what he meant by that. He narrated the entire story. She was sad no doubt, but couldn't refrain from laughing. She said, "It is high time that you see an eye-doctor father. This happened because you didn't see the glass window."

After spending a week at his daughter's place he started his return journey; this time also by train. As before, he travelled by first class. This time, he thought, he wouldn't have the same experience. But when he got into the train, two Englishmen and an Indian officer who was accompanying them were in the compartment. The Englishmen were sitting on both sides of the berth and the Indian Officer on a smaller berth opposite to them; Nambudiri decided to sit in between the Englishmen, in the middle. After sometime, he suddenly felt like singing a Kathakali song, and he started singing. The Englishmen didn't like it. So one Englishman said, "Donkey." The other Englishman, as if in a reply, remarked, "Monkey." Nambudiri had some knowledge of English. He said in Malayalam, "Madhyathil." What he meant was, 'in between' i.e., I am sitting between a donkey and a monkey. The Malayalam knowing officer could follow the joke and appreciating it, instead of getting angry, simply laughed.

On that day, the Numbudiri had a safe journey.

(II) BETWEEN THE HORNS

A NAMBUDIRI WAS OUT FOR an adventure. He wanted to do something remarkable. One day he saw a bullock, which had shapely curved horns. An idea struck him. He decided that he would put his head in between its horns. The next day he saw the same bullock in a solitary place. Immediately he went near it and put his head in between its horns. The bullock got frightened and started running with the Nambudiri between its horns. The Nambudiri shouted for help.

Hearing his shouts and the commotion, many people gathered. They



succeeded in catching the bullock and extricating the Nambudiri's body out of its horns. The Nambudiri was very much perplexed. Then someone from the crowd asked him: "Nambudiri, why did you do such thoughtless deed?" "My God," said the Nambudiri; "how can you say that it was a thoughtless act? I thought and thought and then only arrived at this plan. It took me a long time to ultimately make up my mind to place my head between the horns of this bullock!" Everyone in the crowd laughed at this reply.

(III) MOOTTAS NAMBUDIRI

ONCE THERE WAS A Nambudiri called Moottas—who was very clever. Another Nambudiri who was a miser, lived near Moottas Nambudiri's house. Moottas wanted to play a trick on the miser. One morning he went to the miser and told him, "Today is my mother's Shradham (death anniversary) day. Please make all arrangements for the ceremony. I am ready to spend any amount of money for it. You must help me to perform it. I belong to a distant place and I happened to come to this village for a short period. I have heard that you are helpful. So please help me." When the miser heard this he was very happy and elated.



Shraddham is a ceremony performed on the death anniversary of a near relative. After the ceremony there is a feast, which the priest himself prepares and in the feast the near relatives of the person who performs Shraddham take part. The miser, who was a priest as well, prepared a grand feast for Moottas Nambudiri. He had told the miser that only he will take part in the feast as his relatives are far away. He said, "I will take a bath in the river, come back and perform the Shraddham." After his bath Moottas Nambudiri went straight to the miser's house. He went inside the room where food was kept, bolted the doors from inside and had his fill. He had a sumptuous meal and when he was about to come out, the priest knocked at the door.

Moottas Nambudiri came out and said, "Oh I have committed a mistake. Today is not my mother's Shraddham day, but my birthday. There was a small confusion. Anyway thanks for the birthday feast. Since it is a birthday. I take the feast as your birthday gift, for which I am thankful." After bidding good-bye, Moottas Nambudiri went home, while the miser gaped at the loss of money he had spent in preparing the feast, hoping to be paid back.

KADAMATTATHU KATHANAAR STORIES

(I) EARLY MISHAPS

PAULOSE, A CHRISTIAN boy, was born at Kadamattom, in north Travancore. Early in his life he lost his parents. He had no brothers or sisters to take care of him. The priest of the church of Kadamattom took pity on the boy and decided to protect him. His idea was to make him a priest as well. The boy too was very intelligent and well-behaved. He was taught Syriac, which was necessary to become a priest. As an initial step to priesthood, Paulose was made a Deacon.

The old priest was a lover of animals and he owned a number of cows. A cowboy used to take them for grazing in the nearby forest. One evening when he returned with the cows, one cow was missing. The priest was very aggrieved to learn this and so, along with Deacon Paulose and a few friends, he set out in search of the cow. They came to know that a tiger had carried it off to the jungle. Each one went in different directions and they returned late in the night. But the Deacon was missing. This was another blow for the old priest, as he was very fond of him. While searching for the cow the Deacon had lost his way. Finally he fell into the hands of a band of robbers. They were cannibals and stayed in a cave in the forest. They would have eaten him, but for the intervention of their leader, who took pity on him. He told him, "You must stay here with us in this cave and no harm will be done to you. But if you try to escape, that will be your end." The cannibals didn't wear clothes and the Deacon was also stripped completely. This was one of the ways of making one remain in the fold; he wouldn't also try to escape without his clothes. The leader of the robbers was proficient in witchcraft and black-magic and he taught the art to Deacon Paulose, who learnt it with great enthusiasm and very soon he became a trusted pupil of the leader and a master in the art of black-magic.

Twelve years passed. The Deacon was getting fed up with the life in the cave and he was becoming extremely home-sick. One day he told his leader that he longed to see his master, the priest. The leader felt sorry for the Deacon, but was at the same time, reluctant to relax rules. At last he said,

"You may leave provided you can elude the guards; I won't stand in your way. Now it is left to you to make an attempt. But I cannot guarantee your safety if you are caught." The Deacon bade goodbye to the leader. By his witch-craft he made the guards sleep and started his journey home. But it was no easy task to find his way to his old home in Kadamattom. He knew that the guards would wake up soon and pursue him.

Deacon Paulose walked the whole night and early in the morning came to an old woman's hut. He was very hungry and asked the woman to give him some food. But she had no food with her; in fact, she herself was starving. Then the Deacon asked her to bring a grain of food. The old woman brought a grain of rice and gave it to him. He put it into a pot, poured some water and started boiling it. Very soon rice started boiling and there was one potful of rice. The woman was very much astonished to see it. He served the rice to the old woman and ate the remaining rice himself. The old woman told him the way to reach Kadamattom. The Deacon reached Kadamattom by dusk and went straight to the old priest, who received him with great joy. He had never expected this reunion because the priest thought that Paulose had died somewhere in the forest. The Deacon also was equally happy to see his old master.

But this happiness did not last long. The cannibal robbers traced him, came to Kadamattom and entered the church there. The priest was informed by a Sexton in the church that some evil men had entered the church. Immediately the Deacon and the priest came to the church. Being in Deacon's dress he thought that the cannibals would not be able to recognize him. He asked them, "Whom do you want? Why have you come here?" "We want you. We are going to take you with us. Get ready. Don't think that you can elude our vigilance. Don't take us to be fools," commanded the cannibals. So saying, they stepped forward to catch him, but suddenly they fell down, as if dead. The old priest thought that they were all dead and started preparing for their last rites, when the Deacon said, "Father they are not dead. They are just under the hypnotic spell of my black-magic. After some time I shall wake them up." He did so and the cannibals ran for their lives.

The old priest and others present there were astonished to see these miracles. They believed that the Deacon had some divine gifts. Very soon he was consecrated as a full priest. He came to be known as 'Kadamattathu Kathanaar,' that is, the priest of Kadamattom. He utilized his magical powers always for the benefit of those who required his help, and very soon his fame spread far and wide.

(II) KATHANAAR AND KUNJUMON POTTI

IN KADAMATTOM THERE WAS another expert in black-magic by name Kunjumon Potti. After Kadamattathu Kathanaar's arrival, both of them became thick friends. Each one respected the other's powers but at the same time there was a professional rivalry between them.

One morning Kadamattathu Kathanaar paid a visit to Potti. He went there in a country boat, as that was an easier mode of transport in those days. Kunjumon Potti saw the boat at a distance and came to know that it was a boat without oars or boatman. Potti knew that the boat was being driven by Kathanaar's powers; yet he asked him, "Why didn't you get a boatman ?" "Oh, I can manage without one," the priest said.

Kadamattathu Kathanaar and Potti talked together for a long time and took their lunch. In the evening, the priest wanted to go home. But Potti requested him to stay for the night. The priest said that he had some urgent work to do and pleaded to Potti to allow him to go. The priest came out of the house, but his boat was not to be seen. He knew that Potti had tried some trick on him. After a search he saw the boat on a tree. Potti wanted to teach him a lesson and so, by using his powers, had the boat tied up on the highest branch of a tree.

The priest again said, "My dear friend, please let me go. I want to go today itself. Please bring down my boat." "Oh ! that is beyond my powers," replied Kunjumon Potti, with a smile. "Aha ! If you do not help me your women folk will suffer. Saying this, Kathanaar raised his hand and Potti's women came out of the house one by one screaming at the top of their voices with total madness. Then Kunjumon Potti begged the priest," Please stop this. I will bring down the boat at once." The boat was brought down, and the priest started his journey homeward. Thus Kathanaar had his way, and his superiority over Kunjumon was proved.

(III) KATHANAAR AND THE YAKSHI

IN THE OLDEN DAYS, when there were no proper roads, Thiruvananthapuram in north Travancore was connected with Padmanabhapuram in the south by a narrow path. It ran through a jungle and people were afraid to go that way, especially after night fall. A *Yakshi* or an evil spirit, used to live on a Pala tree on one side of the path. This *Yakshi* would appear as a beautiful maiden to a traveller who would be captivated by her beauty. Once he would follow her, and touch her, she would turn into a devil, scream, bite and drink the victim's blood and eat up his flesh.

Kadamattathu Kathanaar had heard about this *Yakshi* who was responsible for the death of several people. He wanted to put an end to this menace. So he dressed himself as an ordinary traveller and reached the place infested by the *Yakshi*. He walked along and when it became dark, the *Yakshi* appeared before him. She was so beautiful that he couldn't believe his eyes. She started talking to him and asked for a little lime to be mixed with her betel leaf. The *Yakshi* caught her victim only when he touched her and Kathanaar knew it. So he took a little lime on the tip of an iron nail and offered it to her. *Yakshi* did not take the lime. She tried to avoid it, but there was no escape. It was a magic nail and she could not escape. Such was the magical power of the priest. By the same magical spell he drove the nail into her head, and thereafter she became his slave.

Kathanaar went straight to Kayamkulam, where his aunt lived. He went to her house and asked her, "Auntie, do you want a maid servant?" The aunt was in need of one and she said, "Yes, I want one very badly." "Alright," Kathanaar said;

"I have brought one for you." The old lady was very glad. At the very sight she liked the girl very much and engaged her as a maid. Kathanaar took his lunch and went inside the house to take some rest. The old lady started to comb the hair of the girl so as to make her appear prettier. Then she found a nail in her head and asked her what it was. The girl replied, 'I don't know, Madam. It was there for quite some time.' Then the old lady asked, "Why should it remain there? I shall pull it out?" And she pulled it out. Then the girl vanished mysteriously. The old lady had a rude shock and she screamed. Kathanaar was asleep at that time. When he heard the screams, he woke up

and came out of the house. His aunt told him what had happened. "Oh ! Has she escaped ?" he asked. "Then I must find her out," so saying, he went out in pursuit of the *Yakshi*. At last he saw her at a distance. She was fleeing in haste to take refuge in some safe place. Kathanaar followed her. At last they came to a place called Mannar, on the banks of the river Pamba. The Yakshi crossed the river in a boat. No other boat was available there. So Kathanaar cut a big banana leaf, and by his magical powers, crossed the river on it.



He went near her. At once she fell at his feet and begged him to spare her life. She promised that she would not hurt anyone in future. Kathanaar took pity on her and asked her to dwell in a small *Kavu* or temple there itself. In due course this temple came to be called Panayannar Kavu. It is believed that she is still there and on full moon nights she appears as a very beautiful girl. However, she has kept her promise.

SABARIMALA STORIES

(I) THE LORD OF SABARIMALA

IN KERALA AND IN the other southern states. Lord Ayyappa is a very popular deity among the Hindus. Streams of pilgrims rush every year to have a *darshan* of the deity. Some go every year. The abode of Ayyappa is Sabarimala in the Western Ghats. It is a huge hill temple and the story of this temple is very interesting.

The Pandaya Raja of Madurai (now in Tamil Nadu) was in great distress due to the illness of his Rani. She had severe pain all over her body and no physician could cure it. She had been crying with pain and the Raja was very much aggrieved to see her suffering. At last the Raja's army officers brought a physician to treat the Rani of her illness, but even his treatment did no good to her. Finally the physician said, "My Lord, I have tried my best, but my medicines are not effective. I know one medicine which will cure her, but it is very difficult to get."

"Tell me about it," the Raja requested the physician; "If it is available anywhere on earth, I will get it. I don't mind paying anything for it." "The medicine is the milk of the tigress," said the physician. "But as I told you it is difficult to get it -- almost impossible. The tigress is usually ferocious. It becomes more dangerous when new born cubs are near it. Only your soldiers may be able to help."

"I don't think so. Even they would be afraid to go near a tigress with new born cubs. They may be able to shoot it, but how will they go and milk it? That is impossible!" the king quipped. "I have heard that your Commander-in-Chief is very able and competent and he can get things done easily," suggested the doctor.

"Why not send him for this job, he may succeed." "All right, thank you for giving the advice. I shall consult him," said the king.

The Raja's Commander-in-Chief was Ayyappan. The Raja had met him in a forest, while hunting. The young man impressed him very much. He was very smart, handsome, and extremely skilled in using bows and arrows. The

Raja took him into his service. The young man proved himself to be a very good soldier. He was a valiant warrior and he came out victorious in whichever mission the Raja sent him. Very soon, the Raja made him, his Commander-in-Chief. This was not liked by some senior army commanders who were aspiring for this post. Instead of giving the post to one of them, the Raja gave it to an upstart, an alien, hailing from Kerala; they thought Madurai was a part of the Tamil country and the Raja and his subjects were Tamilians.

As a matter of fact, the Rani's illness and the physician's arrival were part of a deep conspiracy against Ayyappan, which was hatched behind the Raja's back.

The Rani was approached by the commanders. They told her that Ayyappan was a foreigner and he had great influence over the Raja. The Raja, they said, had become a puppet in his hands. To get rid of Ayyappan, the Rani was requested to pretend illness. The physician was also fake. He was not a physician at all. He was made to say that only one remedy would be effective, i.e. the milk of a tigress. The Commanders were certain that if Ayyappan's name was suggested, the Raja would send him and, in an attempt to fetch the tiger's milk, Ayyappan would meet his end.



After the departure of the physician, the Raja called Ayyappan. He agreed to go. The king was feeling sorry for Ayyappan because it was a risky job; nevertheless he had full confidence in Ayyappan. The Raja's love for his Rani was also immense and somehow or the other he wanted to relieve her of her pain. A few days later Ayyappan returned riding on a tigress. Many tigers and cubs also followed him. This was a grand sight, which was never witnessed in Madurai before. Out of fear the men and women of the town fled. The commanders also escaped stealthily. Ayyappan told the Raja that the animals wouldn't harm anyone and they were his pets.

The Raja was astonished to see this procession of tigers. He knew immediately that Ayyappan was not a human being but an incarnation of God. He prostrated before him and asked for his blessings. Ayyappan blessed him. The king prayed that the animals may be sent back. At once Ayyappan asked the animals to leave and they left. The people gradually returned back to Madurai. The Rani too was very much afraid to see the tigers. She confessed to Raja, "I don't have any pain in my body. I am alright." The Raja was happy.

Then Ayyappan told king, "I am very thankful to you for all the kindness shown to me and the encouragement you have given me. Now the time has come for me to leave Madurai. I know that the army officers here do not like me. I am returning to Kerala, but you can always see me there. Whenever you want my help, just let me know."

Ayyappan went straight to the Western Ghats where he met the great sage Parasurama. He knew that Ayyappan was a God and bowed before him. Parasurama prayed that Ayyappan should make Sabarimala his abode. Sabari Malai was named after Sabari, a woman saint who had met Sri Rama in his wanderings and, according to sage Parasurama, it was an ideal place for the Lord to dwell. Parasurama himself installed an idol of Ayyappa there and went to undergo penance on the same hill.

(II) THE RAJA GOES TO KERALA

AFTER AYYAPPAN'S DEPARTURE from Madurai, the Raja of Madurai became restless. He couldn't stop thinking about Ayyappan. He thought: 'Ayyappan used to tell me that he is the son of God and that his mother is a Goddess. There may be some truth in that. He once said that he has no house or native place and that the world is his home. I should have asked more details about him. He may be Sastha, the son of Siva and Vishnu Maya. Sastha has no permanent place of residence or a home.'

The Raja, being a *Bhakta* or devotee was right in his thinking. Being a saintly man, he wanted to follow Ayyappan. One night, God appeared before him as Ayyappan, who in reality, was *Dharma Sastha*. In due course of time, the Raja decided to leave Madurai and stay in a place in Kerala, near Ayyappan's abode, Sabarimala. He gave his lands to his tenants with the understanding that they would pay him an annual amount. He took all other things like jewellery, vessels and other articles with him and, with his wife and family, the king went to Kerala.

The Raja settled down in a place called Pandalam. There he bought some lands from one chieftain by name Kaippuzha Thampan and built a palace. Very soon, the entire locality came to be called Koikkal, which in Malayalam means palace. Later on the people of that place considered him as their king. And he was called the Raja of Pandalam. He was about to set out to see Ayyappan, when he had a dream in which the Lord Himself appeared and told him, "I am staying in a hill called Sabari. If you come there, you can see me." The next day the Raja, with his entourage started for Sabarimala.

When he reached there, he saw only an idol. The Raja was very much disappointed. He said to himself, "Oh Lord ! You asked me to come here, but I could not see you. You know that I left Madurai, left my kingdom and my possessions there, and came here to be near you!" When he said this, a voice came from behind, "Don't worry. Though I haven't appeared before you I am very much here. Worship this idol, and you will be happy and prosperous. This is my abode." The Raja was very much pleased when he heard this. He stayed there with his men and built a huge temple, so that the devotees could come there and worship the Lord.



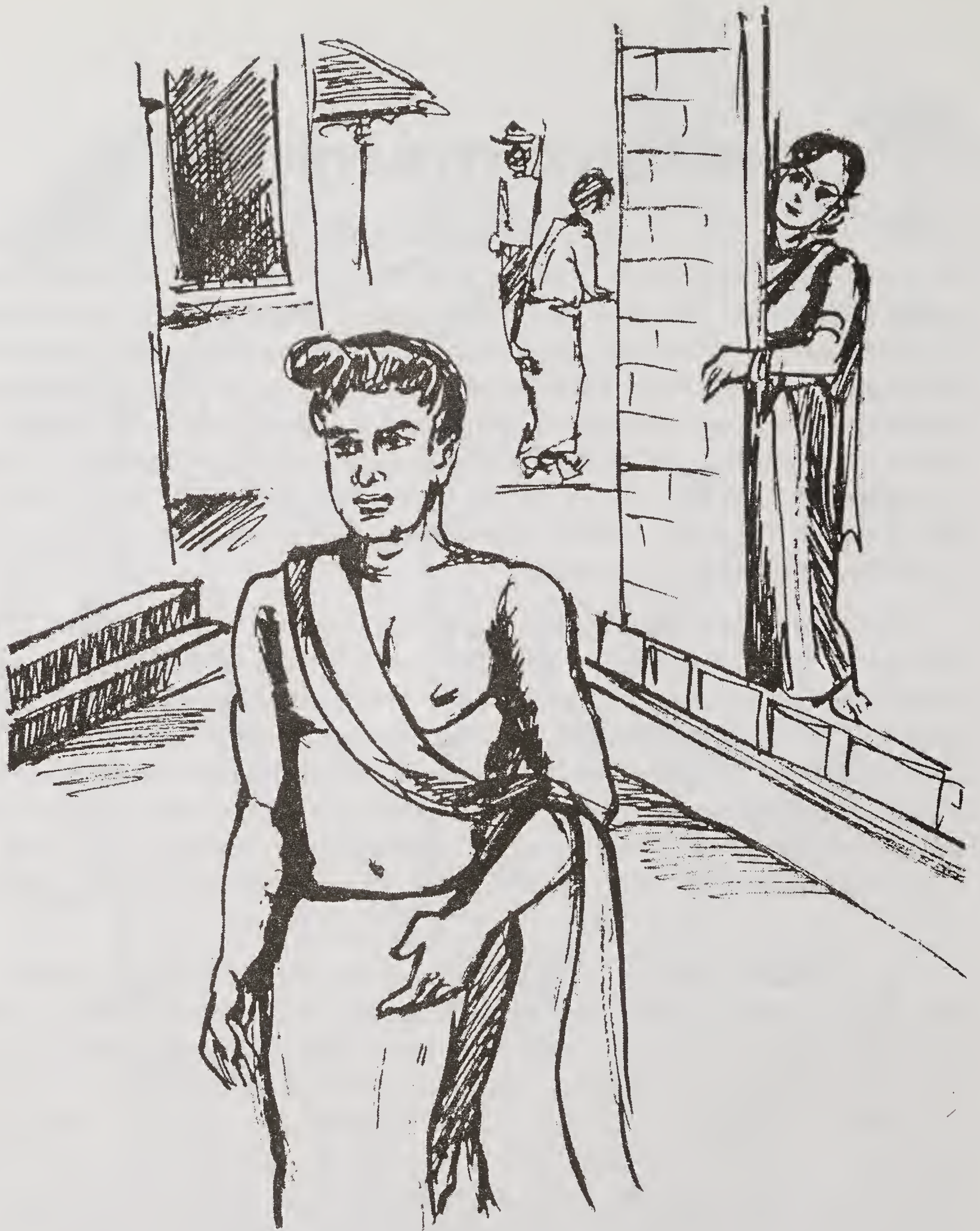
Pandalam Raja adopted Ayyappan as his family deity. The Raja and his family started visiting Sabarimala frequently. As a matter of fact, he wanted to go to the temple and worship Ayyappan every day, but he couldn't do so due to his old age and because of the distance. So he built a temple dedicated to his household deity in Korikkal itself, so that it became easy for everyone in the vicinity to worship Ayyappan, the Lord of Sabarimala, at his doorstep.

(III) MALIKAPPURATHAMMA

AYYAPPAN WAS A strict bachelor—a *Nitya Brahmachari*. The pilgrims who go to Sabarimala have to lead a pure life for forty-one days before going on the pilgrimage. They take bath before sunrise and also before sunset, grow beard and eat only vegetarian food. 'Pure mind and pure body,' is the motto for the pilgrims. During these forty-one days of 'vritha' or penance they perform, 'Kettunira' ceremony after which they take a bundle called 'Irumudikkettu' in which whatever they require for their pilgrimage including rice, salt, coconuts, pure ghee etc., are kept. According to rigid rules, the pilgrim has to cook his own food on the way. Women between the age of nine and fifty-five are prohibited from entering the shrine.

There are certain other rituals also, which a pilgrim has to perform. Those who go to Sabarimala for the first time, are expected to visit a place called Erumeli and take part in the 'Petta Thullar' at the Sastha temple there. This is a special type of dance festival, in which, groups of pilgrims carry on their shoulders all their articles tied up in bundles and suspended from both sides of a pole, with apple-green, yellow and red paint all over the body and go round and round the Sastha temple there, dancing and chanting the glory of Ayyappan. Then they visit the Vavar Mosque nearby and make offerings there.

Vavar was a Muslim warrior, almost as skilled and as mighty as Ayyappan. When the latter went to fetch tigress's milk, Vavar confronted him in the forest. He challenged Ayyappan for a duel. Ayyappan readily agreed and a fight ensued. This fight is vividly described in one of the finest ballads in Kerala. "*Ayyappan vettunnu Vavar thadukkunnu Ayyappa, changathi, kayyinme lvettole,*" are two lines of the ballad meaning-"Ayyappan cuts, Vavar shields; Ayyappa, my comrade, please don't cut my hand." It was a long drawn out fight. Although Ayyappan came out victorious, in the end, he had to admit the strength and prowess of Vavar. Soon he made him his disciple and decided to take him with him as a companion, and asked him to stay in a mosque at Erumeli near Sabarimala. The Lord made it a rule that all pilgrims going to Sabarimala, should offer prayer at the mosque also, and receive *prasaad* from the priest there. Ayyappan not only had a Muslim, but also two Harijans as his companion named Karuppaswami and Kaduthaswami. They were given honoured place.



Ayyappan disregarded the caste system and everyone had access to the temple at Sabarimala. The fame of Ayyappan spread far and wide. Besides the many temples dedicated for Ayyappan, almost in every Kerala temple, a small temple has been built and dedicated to Ayyappan. It may seem strange, the Lord was far ahead of his time. He had a great love for trees and animals. He nurtured the forest all around the temple to such an extent that even now the scenery is picturesque all around. It is believed that in nurturing the forest, Karuppaswamy and Kaduthaswamy helped him throughout.

There is another interesting legend woven around the life of Lord Ayyappan. This is the story of Malikappurathamma, who was the daughter of one of the *Gurus* of Ayyappan. At the very first sight she fell in love with him. But Ayyappan being a vowed bachelor did not respond. At the same time he had all sympathy for her, because her's was true love.

In the Malayalam month of 'Makaram,' a strange phenomenon takes place. 'Sankraman' day, in Makaram is considered to be the most auspicious day for Ayyappan and thousands of devotees come to Sabarimala to view that phenomenon. On Makara Sankraman day, when the Deeparadhana, or worships with lights is over a divine light can be seen on horizon, behind the hills on the northern side of the temple. This is called, 'Makara Jyothi' (divine light) which is visible only for a few seconds. The pilgrims come particularly to see this, and from thousands of throats the chanting of 'Saranamayyappa' rends the ear when the light is sighted.

Makarasamkraman and Makara Jyothi are connected with the story of Malikappurathamma. There is a tragic denouement to this episode. To her plea to marry her, Ayyappan told her, "I shall marry you on Makara Sankranthi night provided no 'Kanni Ayyappan' (new devotee) turns up on that day. You may try your luck every year on Makara Sankranthi day."

The would-be-bride waits endlessly for the happy day on which her desire will be fulfilled. On Makara Sankranthi day the Lord is adorned with his best apparels and ornaments, as if he is a bridegroom ready to receive his bride. The bride also comes out from her abode wearing her best dress and ornaments, on a small elephant to Sabarimala, with the accompaniment of drums and trumpets. All lights are on and she appears at her best. Then someone asks, "Has any Kanni Ayyappan come this year ?" The priest of Sabarimala replies, "Go and see Saram Kuthi Alu (a Banian tree on which every fresh devotee thrusts an arrow). But lo! On that tree there are innumerable arrows ! After seeing this, Malikappurathamma returns disappointed, into darkness. She goes back to her temple and awaits for the next Makara Sankranthi day.

GURUVAYOOR STORIES

(I) THE ORIGIN

GURUVAYOOR, ANOTHER TEMPLE of Kerala, which is as popular as Sabarimala, has many folk tales woven around it. The very origin of the temple is a long tale.

Once upon a time there was a royal couple, King Sutapas and his wife. As they were childless, they began to worship Lord Brahma, the Lord of creation to bless them with a child. In course of time Brahma handed the idol, now installed at Guruvayoor, and advised them to worship that deity for the fulfillment of their wish. Sutapas and his wife started worshipping this idol and after some time Lord Vishnu appeared before them in fulfilment of their prayer. The Lord said that He would be born as their child. He also told them that they would have the good fortune to worship the same idol in all the three *Janmas* or births. After blessing the royal couple the Lord disappeared.

Their first born was Prasnigarbhan who remained a bachelor, or *Brahmachari* throughout his life. He had many famous disciples like Sanaka and he gave the world the great lesson on the powers of celibacy or *Brahmacharya*. In their next *Janma* King Sutapas and his queen were born as Kasyapa and Adithi. They also had the opportunity to worship the same deity. Their son, in this birth, was Vamana, the very incarnation of Vishnu. In their third birth, they were born as Vasudeva and Devaki, and Lord Krishna was born to them. In the long run. Lord Krishna Himself installed this deity in a temple in Dwaraka, specially constructed by Him. In his old age, Lord Krishna told Udhavar, one of His close followers, that there would soon be a deluge, and Dwaraka would be immersed in water.

The Lord requested Udhavar to protect the idol and also to install it in a befitting place elsewhere. Udhavar later told Brihaspati, a saint, of the Lord's desire. But by then the deluge had closed in on Dwaraka. Brihaspati however found the idol floating on the waves and he could salvage it with the help of his prime disciple Vayu, the Lord of the winds. Together with Vayu, Brihaspati set out on a journey in search of a proper place for the installation of the temple.

They travelled far and wide and ultimately reached Kerala, the land of enchanting scenic beauty. There, amidst lush, green vegetation they saw a huge tank full of lotus, where Lord Siva was enjoying a bath. Siva understood the pūrpose of their mission and He suggested, that there was no place on earth as sacred as that place. Accordingly the idol was installed by Guru



(Brihaspati) and Vayu at that particular place on an auspicious day and hour. Thus the place and the temple came to be called Guru-vayoor, a reverential reference to the sponsors Guru and Vayu. It is believed that the original temple in which the idol was installed was designed by Viswakarma, the Lord of architecture.

(II) JANAMEJAYA

THE PANDAVAS, IN THEIR old age, entrusted the task of governing their country to their grandson, Parikshit and left for their capital city Hasthinapur. Before long all of them died. Parikshit had a tragic end, as he was bitten by Takshaka, the King of Serpents. This happened due to the curse by the son of a sage.

Janamejaya, the son of Parikshit, got very annoyed with all *Nagas* or snakes for killing his father. He declared a war on Takshaka the king of snakes. Hell-bent on wreaking vengeance, he started a *Sarpa-yagna* and one after another, all the serpents, were siphoned into the sacrificial fire. Last came the turn of Takshaka. He sought refuge at the feet of Indra, the God of Gods.

Knowing that Takshaka was not prepared to comply with the summons from the *Yagna-agni* (Sacrificial fire), Janamejaya intensified his *yagna* to draw Takshaka alone, or along with Indra himself, if it came to that. Indra got very much frightened and he sought the help of Brihaspati to save him. Thereupon Brihaspati approached Janamejaya and said, "Oh King, you cannot kill Takshaka, because he is one who has partaken of *Amrit* or Nectar, which confers immortality on anyone who takes it. You know, no one can escape fate. Your father was destined to die by snake-bite and Takshaka was only an instrument of destiny and he had no personal grudge against your father. Without realising this, see what you have done! You have already killed countless innocent serpents. So stop this harmful and cruel *yagna* and make amends for this sin." The sage's advice had its desired effect.

Even though, Janamejaya stopped the *yagna*, he couldn't escape the curse of innumerable serpents who were put to death by him. Very soon, he was afflicted with a severe type of leprosy. The king lost all hope in life and he was pining away to his inevitable death, when one day he saw sage Atreya, who told him about the great powers of the idol at Guruvayoor, and said *bhaktas* who sought His blessings attained not only *moksha*, but all that they wanted. Then the sage narrated to him the history of the idol and gave directions to reach the temple. The king was very much impressed when he heard the story and he set forth alongwith Atreya towards Guruvayoor.

On reaching Guruvayoor, King Janamejaya started worshipping Guruvayoorappan, as the idol is endearingly called, with single-minded

devotion. Thus he went on for forty days and on the fortieth night he had a vision of the Lord. In a dream, the Lord told him that he was cleansed of all sins and cured of all ailments. He felt the divine hand, caressingly going up and down his entire body.



When he woke up the next morning he was astonished to see that all ulcers on his body had disappeared and he was in the best of health. Having thus obtained a fresh lease of life he returned to his kingdom.

(III) PANDYA KING

MANY PEOPLE SOUGHT the help of the Lord of Guruvayoor for one problem or the other. A Pandya king was told by his astrologer that he would die, on a particular day, of snake-bite. The king was extremely shocked to hear this and he asked the astrologer whether there was any way out. He told him that there was no escape and what was destined would happen.

The king was in great grief. He had in his service, a Brahmin belonging to Kerala. He told the king that Lord Guruvayoorappan would help all people who sought His mercy and advised the king to go there and worship Him. "What human efforts cannot do, divine grace could," the Brahmin said; "He will not forsake you if you pray for His blessings with single-minded devotion. You can do nothing else but seek refuge at the lotus feet of Shri Guruvayoorappan."



The Pandya king went to Guruvayoor. Most of the time he remained within the precincts of the temple. He thought that if he were to die of snake bite, it would better be within the precincts of the temple. Days passed by and he remained in the temple from dawn, when the *pooja* started, until late in the night, when the last *pooja* of the day was performed.

Thus the Pandya king spent his days till his star-crossed days were over. When he finally knew that he had outlived his ill-starred days, he was filled with unbounded joy. He commissioned a reconstruction of the original temple and made solid contributions for its upkeep. Then he returned to his astrologer. He told him that his predictions were ill-founded. The king said that he was not only not bitten by the snake, but also he did not see any snake at all.

The astrologer asked the king to show him the toe of his right leg. He then showed the king the scars left by the fangs of a snake. The king was astonished to see it; at least he did not observe it before. The astrologer told him, "Guruvayoorappan is Lord Vishnu Himself. And Vishnu rides Garuda, before which all snakes are helpless. You have escaped unhurt, without feeling even faintly, the sting of the snake-bite. By the grace of Lord Guruvayoorappan you have miraculously overcome your destiny."

(IV) MELPATHUR NARAYANA BHATTATHIRI

IN MODERN TIMES ALSO, there are many instances of the Lord's munificence to his devotees. The most famous story is that of Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri. Bhattathiri was a high class Kerala Brahmin and a great Sanskrit scholar. The story goes that one day his father, Mathrudaathan Bhattathiri, himself a poet and scholar, brought his son Narayanan, in a planquin to Guruvayoor. The young man was only twenty, but except his tongue, no other part of his body was functioning. He was stricken by acute arthritis. No physician could cure him and so, as a last resort, he was brought to Guruvayoor. He became an ardent devotee of the Lord and spent all his time in the temple.

One night, Bhattathiri saw the Lord in his dream. The next morning he felt slightly better. From that day he started writing *Narayaneeyam*, a monumental work in Sanskrit.

Every day Bhattathiri composed a *Desaka* or ten shlokas in praise of Narayana, the presiding deity of Guruvayoor and this continued uninterruptedly for a hundred days. By this time he had composed 1036 verses. This great work is called *Narayaneeyam*. On the hundredth day when he completed it, Bhattathiri regained his normal health. At that time he was only twenty seven years in age. In *Narayaneeyam* he also condensed *Mahabhagavatha* in his inimitable style. This work has gained popularity all over India. There are several *Mahatmyas* (works describing the greatness or importance of a place or deity, etc.) and folk tales extolling the glory of the Lord of Guruvayoor. The *Narayaneeyam*, which may be described as 'the gospel of Guruvayoor' and which identifies Guruvayoorappan with Mahavishnu, the central figure of *Bhagavatha*, is the greatest of these *Mahatmyas*. To the lakhs of devotees who come here on pilgrimage all round the year, the name of *Narayaneeyam* is a great source of spiritual sustenance.

(V) POONTHANAM

POONTHANAM, A CONTEMPORARY of Bhattathiri was another ardent devotee of Guruvayoorappan. Poonthanam was not an erudite Sanskrit scholar like Bhattathiri. There are certain stories prevalent in Guruvayoor to show how Bhattathiri tried to ridicule Poonthanam and the Lord interfered on the side of Poonthanam and put Bhattathiri in his proper place.

Poonthanam also was a Nambudiri, a high class Brahmin. From his very early days he was a devotee of Krishna. After his marriage, he left his native place, Nenmeni and came to Guruvayoor. For some years he didn't have a child. He spent most of his time in the temple. Later a son was born to him. But on *Annaprasam* day, or the rice-giving ceremony, the child died due to an accident. Poonthanam was very sad. To drown his sorrow, he became more and more devoted to the Lord. Then he wrote a philosophical poem, which is sung in Kerala even now. In that poem, the poet consoles himself thus.....

"When little Krishna is playing in my mind, where is the need for another child!" One day Poonthanam had gone to his ancestral house in Nenmeni and was returning to Guruvayoor. It was night time and a thief accosted him on the way. He had no money with him. So the thief asked for his gold ring. Poonthanam was helpless. He beseeched Lord Guruvayoorappan to come to his aid. Suddenly a man appeared and he overpowered the thief. The thief ran away. Poonthanam gave the ring to his savior as a present and continued his journey. That night itself, the head priest of Guruvayoor temple had a dream. The Lord appeared before him and told him, "Tomorrow morning, you will see a ring on my idol. Give the ring to Poonthanam when he comes to the temple tomorrow." The next morning the priest saw a ring on the idol, took it and gave it to Poonthanam. He also mentioned to him of his dream.

Another story linked with Poonthanam is that of Manjula, a woman devotee of the Lord. Manjula used to make a garland every day and sent it to the temple to be adorned on the deity at the time of the last puja. One day she was a bit late and when she went to the temple with the garland, the last *puja* was already over. Poonthanam saw her standing there with the garland in hand and he knew the reason. He told her, "It doesn't matter if you couldn't give the garland in time. You leave the garland at the foot of the banyan tree in front of the temple and go home. The Lord will accept it." She did so and went

home. The next morning when the priest was removing the garland of the previous day from the idol, he saw one garland which was not on the idol the previous night. He was astonished to see it. He tried to remove that garland also, but it was not coming off. The priest was very much perplexed and stood there, not knowing what to do. Poonthanam who was praying in the temple at that time saw this and he told the priest, "This garland was sent by Manjula last night. You think that it is Manjula's garland and take it out. It will come off." He did as instructed and the garland came off. The banyan tree on which Manjula placed the garland is still known as 'Manjula Aal,' meaning Manjula's banyan tree.



Like Bhattathiri, Poonthanam also wrote many religious books; about twenty two in number. It is believed that he lived up to his nintinth year. His end is shrouded in mystery. It seems he had a premonition of his end. One night the Lord came before him and told him that the next day he was coming to his house as a guest and Poonthanam would go with him to paradise. The next morning he told his wife about it and made all preparations to receive the honoured guest. He prepared a nice feast and even decorated his home. His wife did not take it seriously. She thought that it was one of his hallucinations. But his maid servant believed it. She requested, "Shall I also come with you to Heaven, Master !" "Yes," replied Poonthanam. The next moment she fell down dead. When the preparations to receive the Lord were over Poonthanam came out of the house and told his wife, 'He has come in his chariot to take me to the Heaven. Let me go,' and he disappeared at that very moment.

This illustrated book for children contains more than fifty folk tales of Kerala covering a wide range of subjects. The author has presented these stories in his unique style. Though mostly meant for children, these tales, irrespective of age, entertain and educate everyone.

The author, I.K.K.Menon is a prolific writer in Malayalam and English and has quite a few books to his credit.



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